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**‘MIXED RACE PROJECTS’: PERCEPTIONS, CONSTRUCTIONS AND  
IMPLICATONS OF MIXED RACE IN THE UK AND USA**

**Chamion Caballero**

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine contemporary ‘mixed race projects’ in the UK and USA. Drawing on Omi and Winant’s (1994) ‘racial formation theory’, the thesis examines the constructions, perceptions and implications of mixed race within two countries with a shared history of framing ‘mixedness’ in terms of ‘black’ and ‘white’. The first main contention of the thesis is that the ‘pathological’ legacy of the ‘first wave’ of conceptualising mixedness is being challenged by a ‘new wave’ framework which normalises ‘interracialism’. However, although this ‘new wave’ is succeeding in challenging the dominant legacy, there is an increasing schism within its ranks between those who conceptualise mixedness mainly in terms of *individual rights* (the ‘second wave’) and those who conceptualise it primarily in terms of *racial projects* (the ‘third wave’). As part of this ‘third wave’, the thesis analyses four key areas of the personal, institutional and racially political ‘mixed’ debates that have sprung up in the UK and USA, two of which are gaining increasing attention in the field – the ‘Multiracial Movement’ and the Census – and two which are to date largely unexplored – cyberspace and minority monoracial groups.

Through its analysis of these important areas, the second main contention of the thesis is that whilst both the UK and USA share an overarching ‘mixed’ conceptual framework, there are significant disparities within this. The contemporary American construction of mixedness as an increasingly ‘divisive’ identity and the British conceptualisation of it as more of a ‘personal’ choice suggests that to be ‘mixed race’ in the UK is increasingly different from being ‘multiracial’ in the USA. Consequently, it is proposed that further research into mixedness in the UK and USA needs to develop new analytical tools – in order both to understand better the specificity of the social relations that have led to these differing constructions and to develop more appropriate strategies for dealing with the social and political implications of these constructions.

## Dedication

*To the Trini and Geordie clans*

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**Author’s Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views in the declaration are those of the author.

SIGNED..........DATE.....18/01/06.....

# **‘Mixed Race Projects’: Perceptions, Constructions and Implications of Mixed Race in the UK and USA**

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**Glossary**

AMEA	Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans
CMC	Computer Mediated Communications
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
HIF	Hapa Issues Forum
ONS	Office for National Statistics
MATA	Mark All That Apply
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PIH	People in Harmony
Project RACE	Project Reclassify All Children Equally

*My old man's a white old man  
And my old mother's black.  
If ever I cursed my white old man  
I take my curses back.  
If ever I cursed my black old mother  
And wished she were in hell,  
I'm sorry for that evil wish  
And now I wish her well  
My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I'm going to die,  
Being neither white nor black?*

**Langston Hughes, Cross**

---

*Fee fi fo fum  
I smell the mongrel blood  
of the Brit nation*

*Be they gentle or be they brute  
Be they Pict or be they Jute  
Be they Angle or be they Saxon  
Be they Roman or be they Dane  
Be they fair by trace of Teuton  
Be they dark by Moorish stain  
Be they Norman with their mouton  
Be they West Indian in their vein  
Be they of Asian mother tongue  
Be they grounded in Celtic grail  
Be they Irish Welsh or Scot  
Be they Jew or Huguenot  
Or the new kid on the block  
I'll have the bleeding lot  
in my melting pot.  
Their mongrel blood will make rich stock.*

**John Agard, *The Giant with a Taste for Mongrel Blood***

## Introduction:

### ‘What Are You...Really?’

*...half-breed, half-blood, half-caste, mutt, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, zambo, griffe, high yellow, mestee, mestizo, dougla, cross, coolie, hybrid, mongrel, zebra, Melungeon, Lumbee, Creole, Eurasian, Anglo-Indian, other, people who tick more than one box, MATA (Mark All That Apply), MOTH (Mixed Other), one of coffee one of cream, black children of a white mother, mixed, mixed race, mixed parentage, mixed heritage, dual heritage, multiple heritages, mixed origins, biracial, triracial, interracial, multiracial, métisse, hapa, haafu, blasian, blackanese, blatina, blaxican...*

*People often ask me the question 'So what are you anyway?' I say, 'I'm a human being. Why? What are you?'*

Derek, 15, Auburn, Washington

Mother: European-American, Father: African-American

(Gaskins, 1995; p27)

In contemporary discussions of the key social issues facing the UK and USA, it is hard not to turn to W.E.B. DuBois's (1905) famous observation and hold that the problem of 'the colour line' continues to persist. Twentieth-century colour line-based patterns of discrimination, inequality and exclusion have followed us into the new millennium, whilst other issues are morphing into multidimensional forms more specific to the twenty-first century (Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001), particularly around the nature of the definition and ownership of racialised identity. Without minimising the importance of other social categories such as class and gender – and the interlinked nature between them all – it would appear that access to, or denial of, many of the social rights and privileges promised by British and American democracies are dependent on one's place on the colour line.<sup>1</sup>

However, whilst there would appear to be a sense of agreement within these democracies on those key issues of social, political, educational and economic inequalities that are emerging from the problem of the colour line,<sup>2</sup> identifying the nature of the colour line itself is a far more challenging task. Indeed, as has

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<sup>1</sup> In both the UK and the USA, minority ethnic people are proportionately more likely to suffer from poverty and deprivation, unemployment, poor education, housing and health and be over-represented in the criminal justice and penal systems. (CRE, <[www.cre.gov.uk/duty/index.html](http://www.cre.gov.uk/duty/index.html)>; NAACP <[www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org)>)

<sup>2</sup> For example, see the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1968.



been pointed out, race is simultaneously an ‘obvious and complex phenomenon’ – one which everyone ‘knows’, yet one which seems to hold no common understanding or meaning (Omi and Winant, 1994: p3). Nowhere is this contradictory nature of race made clearer than in the case of ‘mixed race’. Whilst the illogical nature and inherent indeterminacy of race often goes unnoticed or is conveniently ignored, particularly outside academia, the literal appearance of people designated as mixed race drags these incongruities into the spotlight. Indeed, despite the vast and elaborate array of terminology that has emerged to describe people from what are perceived as ‘mixed’ backgrounds, such labels often fall flat. The extent to which proffered contemporary terms of ‘mixedness’ such as ‘mixed race’, ‘mixed heritage’, ‘biracial’ and ‘multiracial’ are regularly queried and challenged (Camper, 1994; Funderburg, 1994; Gaskins, 1995; Ifekwunigwe, 1998) implies that there is something not quite right with them, that they obscure rather than provide the ‘real’ racial story. Though the inability to place mixed race people indicates that this racial story is a fallacious rather than factual one, the continued attempts to do so demonstrate its continuing power.

The sifting through the ancestries and origins of people of perceived mixed racial backgrounds in the UK and USA as demonstrated by the accounts of Camper et al. suggests that, for many, the imprecision of mixedness is problematic, often uncomfortably so. This unease with vagueness can be glimpsed in the ‘what are you...really?’ question with which people of mixed race are often immediately confronted. Whilst it has several agendas, the ‘what are you...really?’ question – along with similar interrogatives such as, ‘what’s your background?’ and ‘where are you from...originally?’ – seeks largely to overpower the nebulous state of mixedness and reposition it somewhere within a binary framework of ‘either/or’. The neat polar options of this framework have long formed the basis of both understandings and explorations of mixedness in the UK and the USA, casting those of mixed race as ‘neither one thing or the other, yet something nonetheless’ (Sollors, 1999: p2). However, whilst such questions often operate as ‘conversational dead ends’ (Sattris, 1995: p58) in their attempt to compress mixedness into the questioner’s familiar racial categories, the very process of stifling concepts of mixed race often paradoxically works to create them. As



people struggle to find answers that satisfy both themselves as well as those who ask such questions, 'the nebulous' itself is recognised, with the state of being 'something else' emerging more and more as a legitimate alternative to the binary choice of either/or.

The growing recognition of mixed race as an identity option is consequently becoming increasingly prominent in the study of the issues of the twenty-first century colour line. Moreover, whilst the nebulous nature of mixed race has previously been of importance and interest in the UK and USA, it is now encountering new forms of conceptualisation. Whilst there is a long tradition in both countries of viewing mixedness as an illegitimate state outside the either/or binary, a contemporary anti-pathological positioning of mixed race has begun to challenge the traditional lens of impurity, abnormality and marginality through which it has historically been viewed. However, whilst this anti-pathological positioning has been highly successful in challenging the denigrated state of mixedness, it has been less successful in incorporating new understandings of mixed race into the framework of twenty-first century colour line issues as a whole. The study of mixed race, now as then, is too often dislocated from understandings of race as a whole, particularly in terms of the socio-cultural, historical, political and economic processes behind the production of notions of race, and the concepts attached to the production of these ideas, such as racisms and anti-racism, for example.

Thus, the challenge for contemporary studies of mixed race is to refocus the analytical gaze and illuminate not just the perceptions of mixedness but also its constructions and implications. The purpose of this thesis is to do just this. It aims to examine the concept of mixed race in two countries – the UK and the USA – which have long histories of perceiving race in terms of black inferiority and white superiority with the consequence of positioning mixedness as a pathological state. As the two countries are now both experiencing counter ideologies to this pathologisation and engaging in a shared emergent dialogue, it seems both appropriate and timely to ask why and how the attempt to reposition mixedness has come about in the UK and USA, who is both driving it and opposing it and what effect these counter ideologies are having on understandings of racial formation in each society. The following chapter sets

out in more detail the means by which this will be done. by explaining the rationale behind the research focus, setting forth the questions underpinning this focus, introducing key aspects of the theory and methodology involved and summarising the content of the remaining chapters of the thesis and the aims of the work as a whole.



## Chapter One:

### Mixed Race in the UK and USA



*Time, Special Issue on Immigration, Fall, 1993.*

#### Why Study Mixed Race?

Without doubt, the UK and the USA have witnessed a surge in interest in researching and analysing mixed race over the last decade. Since the 1990s, both countries have produced an impressively prolific number of books, academic and newspaper articles, conferences and television and radio programmes which engage seriously with mixed race issues. It appears to be a topic with which more and more researchers are beginning to be concerned. So what lies behind this seemingly sudden interest in mixedness?



The standard view within much of the contemporary literature on mixed race is that it is the ‘biracial baby boom’ of the late 1960s onwards which has forced mixed race to the forefront – that is, the increase in the number of mixed race people caused by the dismantling of antiquated anti-miscegenation laws in the States and an accompanying shift in attitudes to interracial relationships on both sides of the Atlantic (Root 1992; Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Daniel, 2002). Indeed, the data is impressive: US Census data indicates that the 149,000 interracial married couples reported in the United States in 1960 had risen to 1.46 million in 2000 and 6.8 million Americans opted for the new ‘tick one or more races’ option in the US 2000 Census.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in the UK, a national survey of minority ethnic people conducted in 1997 supported the indication of earlier small scale findings that suggested increasing outmarriage trends, particularly amongst the black British population (Jones, 1984; Berrington, 1994). The 1997 survey showed that half the black British male population and one third of the black British female population have a white partner (Modood et al., 1997). These findings are in line with recent 2001 Census data which indicates that the percentage of interethnic couples has risen to 2% from the 1.3% reported in the 1991 UK Census.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a total of 677,177 people in England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland chose the new ‘Mixed’ category in the 2001 UK Census,<sup>5</sup> a significant increase compared with Labour Force Survey estimates and Census free text ‘mixed’ entries in 1991 of 390,000 and 230,000 ‘mixed’ people respectively (Berrington, 1996; Aspinall, 2003). In light of such data, it is thus argued that the explosion of increasingly diverse mixed populations over the last few decades – not just the mixing of white and black, but of white and black with Asian, Hispanic, Native American and the inevitable ‘other’ (as illustrated by the *Time* magazine special cited previously) – is making a mockery out of the traditional lines, triangles and pentagons of racial categorisation, leading to a reappraisal of both traditional approaches to the conceptualisation of race and the research conducted around it (Root, 1992). However, whilst the increased

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<sup>3</sup> Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2001; Joint Center DataBank <[www.jointcenter.org/DB/factsheet/marital.htm](http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/factsheet/marital.htm)>; Information Please Database <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0193690.html>>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Census, April, 2001, ONS.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Census, April, 2001, ONS.



numbers of people identifying or being identified as having a mixed background post the 1960s does indeed have a place to play in accounting for the current interest in mixedness, we should be wary of the way in which we embrace demographic data as the sole explanatory factor. Adopting the ‘biracial baby boom’ as the catalyst for this growing form of identity recognition may not only unintentionally add fuel to the notion of pure races – suggesting that a ‘new’, ‘mixed race’ is emerging post the 1960s – but overlooks the following crucial point: in both the UK and the USA, racial mixing has always taken place, albeit often on smaller scales than now and despite social disapproval. What now may mostly be labelled historical terms such as ‘half-caste’ in the UK and ‘mulatto’ and ‘quadroon’ in the USA reflects not only the occurrence of racial mixing but also its social recognition. As a result, it therefore seems more useful to talk in terms of the emergence of a contemporary mixed race *debate*, rather than simply the emergence of a contemporary mixed race *population*. To be precise, in the case of contemporary mixedness it is not just that mixed race people have emerged where there were none before – there were mixed race populations in both the UK and USA before Mildred and Richard Loving defeated the state of Virginia in 1967 and provoked the demise of the last interracial marriage-ban laws<sup>6</sup> – but that mixed race people are emerging in a discursive racial framework where mixedness is recognised and debated. Indeed, it should be remembered that mixed race debates – and, concomitantly, mixed race populations – are not a product of late twentieth century life. Such debates can be found at other times, as can be seen by the historical reports and discussions on the ‘mulatto’ population in southern states of the USA in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Williamson, 1980; Mencke, 1978), as well as the ‘half-castes’ of nineteenth and early twentieth century England (Fryer, 1984; Rich, 1986). It is also important to remember that similar debates have emerged and continue to exist outside of what we might call the ‘Anglo-American world’, whether there be closer connections – such as with the Eurasian debates of the British colonial world, or the coloured population of South Africa – or more disparate ones – such as Japanese discussions over *konketsuji*, i.e. mixed Japanese/other individuals (Ballhatchet, 1980; Young, 1995; Erasmus, 2001; Lie, 2001).

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<sup>6</sup> *Loving v. Virginia*, Supreme Court of the United States, 388 U.S. 1, June 12, 1967.

If we recognise that other mixed race debates have existed, the challenge for studies of mixed race then is to pinpoint both what is specific to these debates and what commonalities operate as connecting forces. Taking the timeframe of the 'biracial baby boom' debate in the UK and USA as the central focus of this work, what is an immediately clear commonality is the attempt to reposition mixed race from a pathological to a normative framework. Whilst it was occasionally argued in previous debates that the mixed race position was not always a negative one – indeed, the American sociologist Robert Park (1928) argued that there were certain intellectual advantages in the 'marginal state' – such ideas were limited due to the discursive racial frameworks of the times. Whilst the largely negative earlier debates in the UK and USA occurred under social structures which embraced constrictive notions of dualism and rigidity, these traditional structures are beginning to strain under attacks from the multidimensional and multicultural models of reality of the late 20<sup>th</sup> (Gilroy, 1993; hooks, 1992; Gergen, 1999). These interpretative models, which are reinterpreting the 'negativity' of the nebulous and marginal into the 'positivity' of the fluid and the dynamic, are the result of the broader attempt to understand the place of the individual amongst the rapid change and diversity of contemporary societies. The increasing search for identity, which has arisen from this development, has increasingly unfolded through a discursive racial framework in which the 'constitutive role of 'internal' and 'external' Others' is recognised as an essential element of the definition of self' (Rattansi and Westwood, 1994, p48). Indeed, it is this way of understanding the social self, defined more simply perhaps as 'the era of identity politics' (Calhoun, 1994), which has facilitated the contemporary and growing interest in mixedness. As the internal and external others demand the space to search their identities not only in relation, rather than as a foil, to the white self but also to the self of others, it is not then surprising that the stereotypical 'other' of mixed race is demanding a new turn in the spotlight, distinct from the notions through which it has previously been understood. Indeed, as identity becomes increasingly politicised, in the sense of demanding its 'right' to recognition, there are increasing signs of a 'Mixed Race Movement' (Small, 2001), in which the mixed race voice – and supporters of it – is dominant in reconstructing mixed race as normative and



legitimate. To this end, the Census and other forms which provide official racial and ethnic data monitoring have become the arenas in which the rights of mixed race people are fought over. However, whilst the official statistics of increasing numbers of mixed race people are used by many different parties to support or challenge the ‘right’ to mixed race recognition, the discursive racial climate in which these statistics are being produced and interpreted must be considered. As mentioned earlier, whilst there is no doubt that Census and other ethnic group data gathering sources clearly show that interracial unions and their subsequent mixed race offspring populations in the UK and USA are increasing, such demographic trends raise important theoretical questions, not only about ‘how racial hierarchies and racial boundaries are managed by white members of multiracial families’ (Twine, 2004: p880) but how and why these hierarchies and boundaries are managed by societies at large. As has been similarly pointed out elsewhere, does such data reflect more an actual growth in the mixed race population or the attitudes of who is answering the question (Owen, 2001: p136)?<sup>7</sup> Similarly in the USA, do the increasing numbers of ‘multiracially’ identified children demonstrate a straightforward increase in the number of interracial unions or the parental concern that it is more important to encourage healthy ‘identity development’ by reflecting the diverse heritage of their children than to make a political statement by identifying them as black? Likewise, do the reduced numbers for multiracial adults reflect the smaller size of this population or the success of African-American lobbying to tabulate or encourage multiracial individuals to identify as black?

As this thesis hopes to show, with the answers to these questions being both yes and no in part, the contemporary interest in mixed race is a more complicated process than the aftermath of a mass ‘interracial love-in’ post the 1967 Loving v. Virginia decision. What is clear, however, is that isolated demographic explanations which do not take social relations into account can overlook the essential question of *how* the mixed race presence is constructed and what the implications of these constructions are. Indeed, as ‘the era of identity politics’ allows us more racialised identity options, we see that what appear to be racial monoliths can actually bend or even splinter as a result, particularly as they

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<sup>7</sup> Schumann in Owen (2001)

encounter the increasingly powerful analytical concept of ethnicity. In both countries, the notion of 'blackness' is bending under the weight of other racial and ethnic options (Modood et. al., 1994; Waters, 2001), including that of mixed 'race' and mixed 'ethnicity'. Yet although there may be more 'racial' and particularly 'ethnic options' available, this is not to say that all options are equally accepting of or acceptable to all. Social, political and historical factors control who is granted and who is denied access to 'old' and also 'new' racial groups (Sollors, 1986; Waters, 1990; Fenton, 1999) Racial monoliths can grow in stature as well as wear away. As shall be explored in detail throughout the thesis, mixedness has the potential to be as exclusive as it has to be inclusive, just as the concept of blackness is and has been. Indeed, in addition to the implications that this inclusiveness and exclusivity are having on the notion of mixedness itself – in terms of an apparent 'hierarchy' of mixedness emerging – there are also consequences for other conceptualisations of race and ethnicity as a whole. The outcome of such implications can be seen in the growing divide in conceptualisations of mixedness between the UK and the USA. Whilst the former is experiencing an understanding of mixedness which is more open to the personal choice of what has been dubbed 'Generation EA (Ethnically Ambiguous)', the USA is finding mixedness to be a much more divisive concept, due to the demands of what have been labelled 'the New Coloured People'.

Overall, approaching mixed race in terms of the debates that occur around it allows us to explore and attempt to understand the nature of those social relations through which ideas of mixed race are constructed and controlled. There is much to be gained from a study of how mixedness is perceived, in the sense of tracking shifting paradigms of racialised identities (why a French/English ancestry does not generally provoke the same reactions as a Jamaican/English one), how such identities are constructed (the reasons behind what is considered a border crossing too far, or even too little) and what the implications of these identities are (the end of race or its concretisation).

However, despite the tide turning in favour of more positive approaches to mixed race, the importance and meaning to be found in the study of it is not unquestioned. Indeed, it is argued in some quarters that the very act of delving into the issue of mixed race has actually caused it to become a matter for



concern, that the emphasis on mixed identities does not highlight the incongruities of racialisation processes, but simply weakens strategies for dealing with and dismantling racism (Jones, 1994; Spencer, 1997). Whilst there is a tendency amongst some who are involved in the 'Mixed Race Movement' to react angrily to such claims with counterclaims of what is being dubbed 'monoracism' – i.e. prejudice against mixedness – it should be seen that these are criticisms that must be engaged with and answered in full, if an honest and fruitful dialogue is to occur. The study of mixed race is one which raises many difficult questions around the notion of race – definitions of it, approaches to it, applications of it – for both self and society. If there are to be productive discussions about race and related issues, then mixed race must be part of that dialogue. However, it must also be acknowledged that this dialogue will bring as many questions and challenges to the discussion of race as it does potential answers and directions. Nevertheless, there must be room to discuss the importance and necessity of focusing on mixed race both in terms of personal identities and the consequences of being able – or not able – to express these identities formally and informally. As such, it is important to ask not only what are the agendas of those who support the recognition of mixed identities, but also what are the agendas of those who oppose this recognition. Similarly, it is critical to ask not only to what extent the adoption of such identities helps or hinders the means of fighting prejudice, discrimination and racisms but also to what extent rejecting such identities does so. What is required is an approach to mixedness which is able to locate it within a wider understanding of the production of notions of race in the UK and USA, rather than from the narrow 'Mixed Race Movement' or 'monoracist' perspectives that have dominated the debate so far. In brief, what is needed is the 'theorising' of mixed race.

### **Studying mixed race**

As argued earlier, it is not simply a demographic rise in mixed race people in the UK and USA which has made it a focus of much recent study, but rather a complex interaction between demographics and changes in social attitudes and structures which dictate whether such matters are recognised and the way in which this recognition is played out. Although there has been some sporadic

academic debate on mixedness in the USA during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century – for example, Reuter’s *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918) and *Race Mixture* (1931); Park’s *Human Migration and the Marginal Man* (1928); Stonequist’s *The Marginal Man* (1937); Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944) and Berry’s *Almost White* (1963) – this ‘first wave’ of studies emerging from popular conceptions of mixedness has tended to view the subject from socio-psychological frameworks in which a negative prognosis is the norm. It is only over the last decade or so that the emergence of a positive approach to mixed race has been seen. Driven by ‘insider-led’ research, which explicitly challenges the problematic nature of mixed race identity, there has been no less than a revolution in respect to how mixed race is becoming critically located and explored. Amongst the pioneering research in the USA is Root’s *Racially Mixed People in America*, (1992) and *The Multiracial Experience*, (1996); Zack’s *Race and Mixed Race* (1993) and *American Mixed Race* (1995); Funderburg’s *Black, White Other* (1994); Gaskins’s *What Are You?* (1995) and Korgen’s *From Black to Biracial* (1999)<sup>8</sup>. Whilst this body of research obviously varies somewhat in focus and tone, it is undoubtedly united in its attempt to reposition mixedness from the margins. Indeed, this ‘new wave’ of mixed race research is now distinctly framed in terms of identity, not marginality (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002) and in the UK as well as in the USA, Stonequist’s reworking of Park’s concept of the marginal man which dominated earlier twentieth century studies is being challenged and rewritten. Indeed, whilst British based research carried out in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s such as that by Richmond (1954), Collins (1957), Hill (1965), and Little (1972) tended to adopt Stonequist’s view that mixed race people had inherent psychological problems (Wilson, 1987), contemporary UK research attitudes to mixed race have also undergone a marked change due to a shift in social attitudes and the increasing incidence of insider-led studies sensitive to the complexities of the mixed race experience. Amongst the new

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<sup>8</sup> Though recognising the contribution that Spickard’s *Mixed Blood* (1989) and Davis’s *Who is Black* (1991) have made to understanding the history of miscegenation in the United States, they are not included in the above list as both books approach mixedness primarily from a historical perspective, rather than from a perspective which directly challenges and criticises traditional ideas about mixedness through contemporary personal accounts. The tenth anniversary edition of Davis’s work, however, does include a new section which analyses and comments on this literature and the Multiracial Movement as a whole (Davis, 2001).



wave of research in the UK can be counted Wilson's *Mixed Race Children* (1987); Tizard & Phoenix's *Black, White or Mixed Race* (1993); Ifekwunigwe's *Scattered Belongings* (1999) Parker & Song's *Rethinking Mixed Race* (2001); Olumide's *Raiding the Gene Pool* (2002) and Ali's *Mixed Race, Post Race* (2003). As with the American studies, in their positioning of mixed race as normative, this new British research marks a distinct move away from the 'problem approach' that constituted the research frameworks of earlier eras.

The rejection of linear models of adjustment and identity development in favour of more fluid and dynamic forms which challenge the marginalised, 'confused' state of the mixed race individual are not the only elements shared by the UK and the US research. For the most part, these studies have predominantly revolved around the notion of a black/white duality to the extent that mixed race was and is still mostly taken as a synonym for black African/Caribbean and white European mixing and mixtures. However, as the study of race has itself been challenged by the greater analytical usefulness of 'ethnicity' (Fenton, 1999; p4) the concept of mixed 'race' has also begun to be questioned, and more work on mixes outside the black/white binary, such as Asian mixes and Native American mixes, is beginning to emerge (Wilson, 1992; King & McClain, 1996; Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001). This more recent turn towards the limitless 'multiracial' or 'multiethnic' as opposed to the binary 'biracial' is also reflected in the growth in those who have been labelled 'multiracial activists' – members of groups and organisations who reject the 'one-drop' rule and have mobilised to push for recognition of their mixedness (Small, 2001). Whilst the British groups such as People in Harmony (PIH) and Intermix are not as powerful or vocal as their American counterparts such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA) and Hapa Issues Forum (HIP) (who have had a significant impact on the official bureaucratic recognition of mixed race), in their emphasis on the right to identify as 'mixed', they – along with a certain sector of the academic research – can be considered to form part of the increasingly powerful social faction mentioned previously, the 'Mixed Race Movement' (Small, 2001).

However, whilst the 'Mixed Race Movement' (or 'Multiracial Movement' as it is termed in this thesis to better reflect its American origins and influence) has

undeniably made great inroads into challenging and dismantling many of the rigid and limiting conceptions of racialised identity that large numbers of mixed race people, amongst others, experience. Its failure or disinclination to tackle other issues should give pause for thought. Without negating the importance of the foundations the Multiracial Movement has set down, it is becoming increasingly clear that more critical analysis is needed within the field itself. As a few voices of the 'new wave' have pointed out, overall, the Multiracial Movement is overly concerned with the microcontexts of individual psychosocial relationships at the expense of engaging with macrocontexts of socio-political issues, in terms of political mobilisation against racism or class and economic biases, for example (Clancy, 1995; Small, 2001; Christian, 2000). This emphasis on the individual also leads to a tendency to engage or embrace important social concepts somewhat casually in order to 'move forwards' in the quest for recognition and legitimacy of the mixed race self. Hence, despite the inadequacies of many of the labels used to define mixedness, there is less sustained critical academic debate over terminology than might be imagined; similarly, despite the lack of debate over whether a 'mixed' community exists and what the membership criteria is or would be, there is an increasingly casual usage of this concept as a given and existing norm. As criticisms from outside the field begin to question the agendas of those within (Jones, 1994; Spencer, 1997), it is imperative that research in the field also engages honestly with these issues.

In order to do this an essential shift in the approach to mixed race research has to be made. Whilst much of the socio-psychological based research has proved invaluable in de-emphasising the marginal pathological status of people of mixed race, the means by which social knowledge about mixedness is produced and indeed refuted has not been tackled in as great a depth. As Clancy states, 'if multiracial identity is to "make sense" to society at large, rather than be seen as legitimate only within the mixed-race community, scholars and activists must focus their attention on those institutions that shape the socio-political paradigm on race' (Clancy, 1995: p216). In agreement with this and other similar approaches emerging from the 'new wave', this thesis might thus be considered as locating itself within the 'third wave' of approaching mixedness, in that it is



interested in understanding mixedness at the interconnected levels of the personal, the institutional and the political, rather than at the level of the personal alone. The thesis is therefore situated in a framework which adopts Omi and Winant's (1994) idea of 'racial formation theory', which uses the idea of 'racial projects' to explain how racial concepts are 'created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed' depending on the particular sociopolitical needs of the ruling order and the corresponding forms of resistance, negotiation and acceptance to this (Omi & Winant, 1994; p55). These racial projects – ways in which particular racial dynamics are structured and represented, routinised and standardised – which lie at the heart of the 'racial formation process' frame the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand and the institutional and organisational forms in which race is routinised and standardised on the other (Omi and Winant, 1994; p60). Thus, in contrast to much of the 'second wave' literature, rather than exploring what it means to be mixed race at the individual level, this research is primarily interested in exploring contemporary British and American 'mixed race projects', that is, what it means to be mixed race for both racialised individuals and UK and US societies at large. As such, it rejects what might be called the 'hybridity' approach to mixedness, where mixedness is seen, both literally and symbolically, as representing the creativity of what Bhabha has called 'the third space', that area of cultural fusion produced by the interaction between coloniser and colonised which enables the two original moments to emerge (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Young 1995). In addition to the dangers of invoking the stereotyped conceptualisations of 'the hybrid' (as chapter 2 will illustrate, negative stereotypes of the hybrid go hand in hand with the positive), it is argued that such an approach is located largely within a theoretical framework that is concerned primarily with identity and all its accompanying analytical pitfalls (Anthias, 2001). As Bendle contends, one of the major pitfalls of approaching social phenomena mainly in terms of identity is that it leads to 'an uncritical reliance on what has become a politicized, residual and under-theorized concept' (Bendle, 2002; p4). Where it is theorised, he argues, 'it is generally in terms of the tradition of American ego-psychology that has become fundamentally problematic' (Bendle, 2002; p5). Consequently, rather than focusing solely on

the narrower area of the ego and the individual that a hybridity approach to mixedness is likely to provide (Anthias, 2001: p638). the thesis includes the experiences of mixed race people within a wider framework. This framework includes a focus on both those social relations that have produced concepts of mixedness, as well as a focus on the current and potential implications of these perceptions and constructions for the racial formation processes of both countries. Whilst acknowledging the criticisms levelled at Omi and Winant's racial formation theory – that it may be seen to essentialise race (Miles & Torres, 1999) or it fails to distinguish analytically between ethnicity and race (Kivisto, 2003) – in terms of highlighting the processes at work in creating 'mixedness', which in both countries is largely a racialised, rather than ethnicised concept, it is argued that its utility outweighs its flaws. Indeed, as the racialised nature of British and American mixedness is part of the debate itself – hence the adoption so far and throughout of the key label 'mixed race' to signal this – such criticisms shall be explored further in the analysis of the perceptions, constructions and implications of mixedness throughout the thesis. The next sections of this chapter will discuss in further detail the methodological processes by which this analysis was conducted.

## **Methodology**

### *The UK and USA comparison*

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, both the UK and the USA have long histories of perceiving race in terms of black inferiority and white superiority resulting, amongst other things, in the accompanying notion that the state of mixedness is generally an undesirable one. Furthermore, with both countries sharing a historical and contemporary dialogue on the subject of mixedness, as chapter 2 will discuss in more detail, a project that makes a comparison between the UK and USA would seem not only appropriate but also important, particularly in terms of understanding contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness in the UK. Indeed, such is the nature of this dialogue that it is difficult to discuss mixedness in the UK without some reference to the USA, which is and has been much more prolific in terms of its race and mixed race discourse overall. Even a cursory analysis of the key contemporary literature on mixedness



in the UK reveals the heavy emphasis on exemplar materials from the American field (Wilson, 1987; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993; Ifekwunigwe, 1999; Parker & Song, 2001; Olumide, 2002; Ali, 2003).

However, with a growing body of work highlighting the difference between the wider racial formation processes of the UK and USA (Small, 1984; Torres, 1999; Glazer, 2000) it also seems appropriate to ask to what extent such a heavy reference to and application of the American literature and theorising around mixedness to explain the situation in the UK is fitting. It is argued therefore, that what is now required is a study of mixedness that engages critically with the specificities of the 'mixed' discourses in the UK and USA as well as recognising their commonalities. Such is the aim of this work. The following sections will discuss the ways in which this is to be done, including the research questions underpinning the project and the data material collected.

### *Research Questions*

In order to map the terrain of contemporary UK and US mixed race projects, a set of research questions was designed to explore what this thesis holds to be the essential elements of the projects – the patterns of representation, the accompanying means of articulation and the social structures which maintain the projects as well as those tools which challenge or threaten it. The starting point for the thesis then is to ask that, whilst there is no doubt that terms such as 'mixed race' and 'multiracial' are in current usage in the UK and USA, *how* and *why* are they being used? The question of whether a distinct notion of mixedness is surfacing and what the rationale is behind it provides the mainframe of the research. However, although exploring the same issues of legitimacy and acceptance that can be found amongst much of the socio-psychological approaches to mixed race, this research project is as, if not more so, interested in the process of identification that in identity *per se*, that is to say, it focuses primarily on the discursive contestation of mixed race. For example, a person of mixed Chinese and Irish ancestry might decide to call herself 'mixed race'. Adopting the language of the Multiracial Movement she may feel she has the 'right' to identify herself how she chooses (Root, 1996). Consequently, another research dimension this thesis will focus on is the dynamic between her personal

‘right’ and public ‘recognition’. Is there room in British and American mixed race projects for a Chinese/Irish notion of mixed race, for example, within a notion of mixed race which conspicuously appears to be a black/white one? Is ‘being mixed’ thus the same as ‘being mixed race’? If not, is there a hierarchy of mixedness and, if so, what are the reasons behind it? As is becoming clear from the nature of these questions, it is an interest in the ways in which the notion of mixed race is produced that forms one of the main cornerstones of this research project. As many of the collected accounts of experiences of mixed race people demonstrate, in the course of a day, an individual of mixed black African/white European background may perceive herself, and be perceived, as black, white, mixed or ‘other’ depending on the situation and location and/or other factors (Camper, 1994; Funderburg, 1994; Gaskins, 1995; Ifekwuingwe, 1998). Whilst a socio-psychological approach might tend to concentrate on questions surrounding the multiplicity of identity, this research project is equally as interested in the social constructions behind the perceptions themselves. How and why does the mixed race debate tend to revolve around black and white? To what extent do the debates in the UK differ significantly from those in the USA, which also revolve primarily around a black/white axis? Is there a ‘generic’ experience of mixedness which can be determined? Consequently, the thesis examines both the specificity of contemporary mixed debates within the individual socio-historical contexts of the UK and USA as well as the commonalities to be found between them. It attempts to construct a comparative framework which understands, explains and interprets the diverse historical outcomes and processes and their significance for current social and institutional arrangements (Ragin, 1987; p6) in relation to mixedness in the UK and USA.

As mentioned previously, although not all contemporary studies of mixed race unconditionally or uncritically embrace the individual discourse of ‘rights’ that particularly characterises the multiracial activists, there is nevertheless an apparent reluctance to engage with the ‘politics’ of mixed race. Within, for example, Zack’s (1993) interesting speculative analysis of the eventual move from race to anti-race to the transcendence of race, the here and now implications and consequences of claiming a mixed race identity for notions of racialised political unity are somewhat sidelined. In investigating the place of mixed race in



deconstructing and reinforcing essentialist ideas of race, the research project will also explore the place of mixed race discourse on ideas of racisms and anti-racism. Consequently, another research dimension of the thesis is the dynamic between the personal 'right' of mixed race individuals to have their mixedness recognised and the community 'right' of racialised groups to oppose that right. What effect does the increasing 'official' recognition of mixedness have on the political unity and power of 'monoracialised' groups? By including 'ethnic' mixed as mixed 'race', what might the impact be on 'racial' discrimination? It is hoped that the socio-political perspective provided by utilising racial formation theory will push to the forefront some essential questions that have, deliberately or otherwise, been largely overlooked in the field of mixed race studies so far.

### *Fieldwork and Data Collection*

Working within the analytical framework described earlier, there is decidedly less emphasis in this research on the collection of the experiences of mixed race individuals regarding their thoughts and feelings about being mixed race. This is not to undervalue the importance of the mixed race voice. Indeed, anthologies of the mixed race voice as gathered by Camper, (1994); Funderburg (1994) and Gaskins (1995) constitute a significant part of the 'new wave', acting as its backbone in the sense that the positive aspects of mixedness experienced by mixed race people were and continue to be fundamental in challenging the pathologisation of the 'first wave'. However, what is missing from much of the work of the 'new wave' is the attempt to locate the experiences of mixed race people within wider social contexts. Overwhelmingly, the 'new wave' of literature is concerned with personal, socio-psychological accounts of mixedness, leaving the field somewhat imbalanced in terms of analyses at the wider socio-political level. As the theoretical framework of this research holds that both analytical approaches are important, it is very much concerned with the social processes that create, mediate and control not only the perceptions of mixed race people regarding their mixedness and the perceptions of those around them, but the interaction between the two. How has the discourse of mixedness changed, how does it differ depending on geographical and historical context and what does it tell us about the social structures it operates in?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the research aims to analyse key aspects of the personal, institutional and racially political debates that have sprung up around the concept of mixedness in the two countries. In addition to its analysis of historical and contemporary debates of mixedness in public and elite spaces, such as the media and academia, the project also identified and collected data in three key but under-researched areas where the concept of mixed race is increasingly debated: the Census, in cyberspace and amongst minority 'monoracial' groups. It is proposed that the focus on these three discursive areas will inform the specificities and commonalities of the perceptions, constructions and implications of mixed race in the two countries. These three areas both provide access to areas of shared dialogue between the UK and USA (the cyberspace interactions) as well as areas in which debates are more particular to each country (Census, minority monoracial discourse). The following sections discuss the methodological engagement of these areas and their place in the analytical framework of the thesis in more detail.

### *Census*

It has been argued that whilst the census is only one of many government information gathering devices, it is the most universal and important of them all (Kertzer and Arel, 2002; p35). Indeed the inclusion of a 'Mixed' category on the 2001 UK Census, which allows mixedness to be acknowledged for the first time in British Census history, is being adopted by ethnic monitoring forms nationwide suggesting that the chosen term 'Mixed' will eventually become official racial terminology. Yet how was this term officially constructed? This element of the fieldwork, which constitutes the spine of the fourth chapter, *Mixed Race and the Census*, investigates the processes behind the 'officialising' of mixed race. Working to answer three key research questions – what were the decisions behind the inclusion of the category, who were the people involved in making those decisions and what does the inclusion of the category mean in terms of ethnic data monitoring and thus for ideas of race in a larger sense? – a small series of semi-structured interviews was carried out with key actors involved in the decision behind the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category. To this end, three hour-long interviews were carried out with key members of the



‘working group’ responsible for including and shaping the category – including two representatives from local authorities and one from the academic community – in addition to two hour-long interviews with representatives from the Office of National Statistics to whom the ‘working group’ ultimately reported. Additionally, further interviews were held with those who were not consulted regarding the category’s inclusion, but who, in light of their experience and knowledge of mixed race issues in the UK, were arguably overlooked. To this end, a further hour-long interview was conducted with a member of the academic community who had experience of identifying the mixed race population on national surveys. Additionally, written answers to a questionnaire were provided by members of ‘People in Harmony’ (PIH), the largest mixed race organisation in the UK. As part of the comparative approach of the thesis, these findings were contrasted with an analysis of the much more extensive public debates between multiracial, minority and majority monoracial groups around the proposed but rejected ‘multiracial’ category in the US 2000 Census.

### *Cyberspace*

As has been noted within the ‘new wave’ literature, locating relevant samples of mixed race participants as part of a research project can prove problematic, due both to the dispersed nature of mixed race populations and the narrow class, racial and ethnic backgrounds that those who are usually willing to participate in studies are from (Root, 1992). However, despite the geographical dispersal of the mixed race populations in the UK and US, one of the emergent issues in recent literature is the notion of a ‘mixed race community’. Whilst there is a high degree of scepticism regarding the concept of British and American mixed race communities ‘in real life’ (Thornton, 1992, 1996; Spencer, 2003; Texeira, 2003) it is undeniable that a form of mixed race community is emerging in cyberspace. Moreover, with the Internet being increasingly accessible to diverse groups as a means of communication, the discussion of mixed race online has potential for a larger and more diverse body of participants than discussions ‘in real life’. The second part of the original data thus concentrates on the construction of mixedness that is occurring in the myriad of ‘mixed race forums’ in cyberspace. Over an 18-month period, specific sites were monitored with the aim of

answering the following research questions: how is mixed race viewed amongst those who self-identify as mixed race in cyberspace? Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of these voices and those ‘in real life’? Is there any growing sense of mixedness as a unifying global experience? Is adopting a mixed race identity primarily seen as an individual issue or is there an accompanying awareness of any social consequences or political implications? The findings of the cyberspace discussions were contrasted with discussions of mixedness found both in the academic and activist literature as well as the bureaucratic discourse of the Census.

### *Monoracially Defined Groups*

The third and final tier of the original data is concerned with attitudes and opinions of mixed race amongst monoracially defining minority groups. Whilst there is no doubt that mixed race is being increasingly employed in the UK as a racialised category, the research was interested in asking whether it the case similar labels are employed more by certain groups than others? Do minority monoracial groups distinguish mixed race in the ways that the Multiracial Movement is encouraging society to? Do they view it in a positive way? As chapter 6 demonstrates, there have been some strong objections from minority multiracial groups in the USA regarding the official recognition of mixed race identities. With the inclusion of the ‘Mixed’ category in the Census, it seems pertinent to investigate whether such attitudes are the same in the UK. With very little known about the attitudes of minority monoracials in the UK towards mixed race identity (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002), an attempt was made to identify contemporary strength of feeling on the subject. Whilst, as shall be discussed in depth in chapters 6 and 7, the British minority monoracial voice proved difficult to access on this subject, a working sense of its opinion is provided through an analysis of the minority and broader media. It is hoped that this analysis will help to indicate the nature of minority monoracial attitudes towards mixed race and the ways in which these vary or resemble more established findings on white majority attitudes.



Incorporating the original data within the theoretical mixed race projects framework of racial formation theory described earlier, it is hoped that the research project actively engages the questions of perceptions, constructions and implications of mixed race that it has set out so far. To this end, the research project is divided into the following chapters which undertake to develop the key themes outlined previously.

## **Chapter Guide**

Moving on from the overview of the topic, research questions and methodology provided by this chapter, chapter 2, *Mixed Race Projects: The 'First Wave'*, further discusses the 'theorising' of mixed race. It focuses on the framework of the 'first wave' of constructing mixedness, which is critical in understanding contemporary conceptualisations – both in terms of the pathological legacy of mixedness in popular thought and in terms of the reactive anti-pathological constructions of the 'new wave'. This chapter argues that the construction of traditional American and British racial projects, which pitted the superiority of 'whiteness' against the inferiority of 'blackness', led to the construction of a dominant racial discourse in which what Sollors (2000) calls 'interracialism' – race mixing and race mixture – was primarily seen as abnormal and undesirable. However, whilst the framework of the black/white binary framework is common to both British and American mixed race projects, it is also argued that there are crucial, but largely overlooked, differences in the ways in which both whiteness and blackness, as well as their interaction, have been constructed in the two countries. As later chapters will demonstrate, these differences have significant bearing on the ways in which mixedness is being conceptualised in the current racial formation processes of the UK and USA.

Following on from the exploration of the socio-historical theorising of mixedness in the UK and USA, Chapter 3, *Mixed Race Projects: The 'New Wave'*, turns to the discourse of academic and activist circles and discusses how the 'new wave' of research on mixedness since the 1990s is challenging the pathological conceptual framework discussed in chapter 1. It focuses firstly on the 'second wave' discourse of the 'Multiracial Movement', which conceptualises mixedness primarily in terms of identity and the 'right' to identify as mixed. The argument

is made that, in its attempt to counter the pathological conceptualisations of the 'first wave', the 'second wave' frequently uses the same analytical tools and approaches mixedness largely through notions of identity and the individual. However, as the chapter then explores, an emergent 'third wave' is beginning to critique the individual identity focus of the 'second wave', arguing that the Multiracial Movement and its adherents limit understandings of mixedness to the personal socio-psychological context of the 'mixed race network', rather than locating them within wider social and political contexts.

Chapter 4, *Mixed Race and the Census*, continues to look at the centrality of the Multiracial Movement to contemporary debates on mixedness through exploring the representation of mixedness at the 'official' level. Through an analysis of the fieldwork data previously mentioned, it becomes apparent that the production of racial and ethnic categories revolves around what Bonnett and Carrington call the 'dialectic of control and emancipation' (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000). It is argued in this chapter that the concepts of normality and pathology and their relationship to mixedness are central to an understanding of a recognition of the concept. These arguments are further explored by contrasting the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category in the 2001 UK Census with the rejection of the proposed 'multiracial' category from the US 2000 Census, highlighting the extent of the differences between UK and US conceptions of mixedness.

The fifth chapter of the thesis turns to conceptualisations of mixedness in an area in which it is highly discussed but which has attracted little analytical attention to date. In Chapter 5, *Mixed Race in Cyberspace: Identity and Community on the Internet*, the role of the Internet in contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness is considered, particularly along the lines of whether the debates that can be found there are an extension of or a challenge to the debates found in the areas covered by the thesis so far. An attempt to track and interpret the flow of these ideas is made through a study of the discussions of participants of mixed race Internet forums. The chapter contrasts some of the more 'fluid' notions of the boundaries of mixedness which can be seen to be emerging from these forums with the more 'rigid' boundaries of the Census. It also explores the extent to which the traditional black/white mixed race dichotomy is being challenged as well as the extent to which it is possible to speak of a mixed race 'community'.



the idea of which appears to be taking an increasing hold in cyberspace. The findings of the cyberbased study find that although this notion of community is critiqued 'in real life', the notion which has developed in cyberspace is increasingly influencing conceptions of mixedness in the real world. Consequently, it is argued that conceptualisations of mixedness 'online' are, and will continue to be, of great importance in understanding those conceptualisations that are developing 'offline'.

Chapter 6, *The Politics of Mixed Race*, continues to explore mixedness through another overlooked discursive area by focusing on the largely ignored conceptualisations of mixedness amongst minority monoracial groups. Drawing on analysis of the minority voice in the British and American media, the chapter explores the political implications of claiming mixed race identities, and asks what effect such claims have on the concept of race, in terms of racialised individual and group self-identities as well as their racialised political identities. It is argued that the highly politicised nature of racial projects in the USA has led mixedness to be conceptualised primarily as a 'divisive' identity, whilst the more flexible nature of racial formation in the UK leaves more room for mixedness to be viewed more as a 'personal' choice.

The concluding section provides an overview of the perceptions, constructions and implications of mixed race projects in the UK and USA as a whole. The final chapter, *What Are You...Really? Generation EA and the New Coloured People?* summarises and discusses the main findings and arguments of the thesis as well as presenting some key directions for future research. It is argued that although the overarching concepts of mixedness in the UK and USA share a similar broad constructive framework inherited from the legacy of the 'first wave', to be 'mixed race' in the UK is significantly different from being 'multiracial' in the USA. The engagement with mixedness as more of a 'divisive' identity in the USA but as a 'personal' identity in the UK, is representative of the wider tension within emerging contemporary debate on mixedness between both the conceptualisation of those of mixed race as 'The New Coloured People' or as 'Generation EA - Ethnically Ambiguous' and the location of these conceptualisations within either a 'pro-race' or a 'post-race' theoretical framework. Finally, it is argued that the comparative study of mixed race projects

in the UK and USA conducted in this thesis has helped clarify the specificities of mixedness in Britain and America which are often overlooked in favour of a focus on the commonalities between the two countries. As such it is argued that future work on mixedness in the UK might better be served by developing theoretical frameworks that are tailored to take more account of British racial formation processes rather than transposing existing American theoretical models wholesale.

## Notes

The aim of this introductory chapter has been to set out the wider aims of the thesis as a whole, that is, an exploration of mixedness in the racial formation processes of the UK and USA. The ‘new wave’ of mixed race research is still in its relative infancy and, as such, whilst it is recognised that there are many important areas that need to be explored, many of these essential issues have regrettably had to be omitted due to research constraints as well as to respect for the cohesion of the thesis itself. As such, the thesis limits itself to discussing *mixedness* rather than *racial mixing* which is itself a large area of research<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, in line with many mixed race voices it was felt that an in depth analysis of *racial mixing* would detract from the analysis of the *racially mixed*, which is the focal point of the thesis (Camper, 1994; Gaskins, 1995). To this end, the issue of mixed race relationships is explored only as far as to provide the socio-historical backdrop to the perceptions and constructions of mixed race people in the UK and USA. Additionally, the thesis does not explore policy-centred issues of adoption and fostering, or education, although it recognises that some interesting and important work is beginning to emerge in these areas (Barn, 1999; Treacher & Katz, 2000; Tikly, Caballero & Haynes, 2004). Furthermore, as identified earlier, the comparative nature of the project as has been restricted to the dual model of the UK and the USA. Undoubtedly, there are valuable insights to be gained from designing a larger comparative model in relation to analysing the perceptions, constructions and implications of mixedness. In particular, a model that would allow the subject to be approached from outside

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Fryer, 1984; Walvin, 1973; Mencke, 1978; Lorimer, Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Modood et al. 1997; Olumide, 2002; Kouri, 2003.



the black/white binary model that has dominated the majority of works on mixedness to date (Omi, 2001) would be particularly illuminating. This is not, however, to negate some of the interesting work that has been done in the area of the black/white binary, particularly as regards comparisons in which mixedness in societies with extreme black/white polarities, such as the USA, are contrasted with societies such as Brazil where these polarities, though in place, are less extreme. Works in this vein – such as those by Degler and Nobles – illustrate how it is *social processes* that work to create notions of mixedness rather than the concept of race itself (Degler, 1971; Nobles, 2000; 2002). In this sense, it is proposed that works that can illuminate these processes by showing how they operate when whiteness and blackness are not the primary mixer components, as it were, would also be of great value. To this end, a tripartite comparative model between the UK, US and Japan was initially conceived in order to show how arguments regarding the undesirability – or at times desirability – of mixing races are dependent on social factors rather than the notion of blackness or whiteness *per se*. However, once it became clear that the subject of the UK and US Censuses and accompanying ‘Multiracial Movement’ would not only provide a more timely and important comparison but that it would also produce such a wealth of data that the incorporation of additional data would be unfeasible and unworkable within the remit of a thesis project, the decision was made to keep the focus to the UK and US only. However, as discussed in the concluding chapter, it is hoped that through the contribution to understanding the processes of mixedness in the UK and USA that this thesis makes, projects which are able to incorporate comparative dimensions such as Japan will be more workable in the future.

It must also be noted that the overwhelming focus of the literature – both past and present – on the black and white focus of mixed race has also shaped the focal point of this project. As both contemporary and historical debates on mixedness in both the UK and USA have centred around the white/black dichotomy, the thesis itself is primarily concerned with the perceptions, constructions and implications of this ‘mix’. This is not to suggest that it is unconcerned with or dismissive of the histories of other ‘mixed race projects’. Indeed, where possible, it does draw on other debates of mixedness to highlight

what is general and specific to the formation of mixed racial projects in the two countries. Nevertheless, the paucity of information on mixes outside the black/white binary must also be taken into account as regards the current focus of the thesis. It is only in the last few years that more substantial work on other mixed race histories is beginning to emerge (Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001) – overall, however, the field remains noticeable for its lack of comprehensive accounts of mixedness outside the black/white binary (Wilson, 1992).

Finally, a note on terminology. The terminology of mixedness is both complicated and controversial (Shrage 1995; Ifekwunigwe, 1998; Aspinall, 2003). As the long process of discarding terms such as ‘Negro’ and ‘Coloured’ in favour of those such as ‘African-American’ and ‘Black British’ has demonstrated, self-naming is an important step to empowerment (Root, 1992). However, whilst attempts to empowerment can be seen in the rejection of terms such as ‘half-caste’ and ‘mulatto’ in favour of ‘mixed race’, ‘multiracial’, ‘mixed heritage’, etc. and the appearance of terms such as ‘Afroasian’, ‘Blasian’ (Black and Asian) and ‘hapa’ (East Asian and other mix) reflecting growing and/or previously ignored racial mixes, the terminology of mixedness presents certain theoretical challenges. Thus, although ensuring that mixed race is seen as ‘stable’ is a critical part of the struggle for empowerment, the pathological tradition challenged by the ‘new wave’ remains reflected in the terms commonly used to describe people of mixed backgrounds. Overall, all labels utilised to describe mixedness fundamentally demonstrate essentialist and bipolar thinking (Phoenix and Owen, 1996), since the notion of mixedness itself emerges from and largely inhabits an essentialist and bipolar state.

The attempt to de-pathologise mixedness whilst using the terminological tools of pathology is a thorny theoretical dilemma. The most vocal advocate for the need to adopt new, less pathologised language is Jayne Ifekwunigwe (1998) who originally proposed the term ‘métisse’ to describe those of mixed backgrounds. Ifekwunigwe however, recently proceeded to drop this label, which she began to argue further exoticised mixedness, in favour of a return to the most common UK term, ‘mixed race’, on the grounds that the latter doesn’t retreat from a racialised discourse (Ifekwunigwe, 2001).



On the whole, there seems to be a tacit consensus within the 'new wave' regarding the continued pathology of mixedness through language to agree that whilst self-reflexivity is tempered by the linguistic restrictions of the current racial framework, mixed race people are simply 'using the discursive resources that are available to them within the existing definition of race' (King & McClain, 1996, p230). Such is the position. It is argued in this work, as with most contemporary studies, that it is currently beyond the scope of the field to engage with mixedness without drawing on terms rooted in the pathology of the 'first wave'. Consequently, it has been decided to use terms that acknowledge the racialisation processes which have produced the concept of mixedness as a whole. In this respect, the term 'mixed race' is generally employed throughout, both reflecting its common usage in the UK and the theoretical position that mixedness is largely conceptualised as the crossing of 'racial' rather than 'ethnic' borders. However, where race is used in connection with mixedness, it is more appropriate to read the term 'race' as being taken to mean 'racialised' identity rather than 'racial' identity and, as such, it is argued that conceptualisations of mixedness can include those of mixed ethnicities if these ethnicities are themselves racialised. The term 'mixedness' is mainly used to describe the state of 'being mixed', although it is also used as a stylistic alternative to mixed race. At times, the term 'interracialism' is borrowed from Sollors (2000) when both the process of crossing racial borders as well as the state of being mixed is being stressed. A consistency has been attempted in the use of terms such as 'black', 'white' and 'Asian' which generally refer to groups in the sense of their racialised identities or their racially political position. Occasionally 'African-American' is employed in relation to groups or organisations who refer to themselves in this way and antiquated terms such as 'Negro', 'mulatto', etc. are also used when there is a need to highlight the historical context. Similarly, 'multiracial' is employed at times to reflect the common usage in the American context. Where there are any inconsistencies in usage, it is hoped the reader will be sympathetic to the difficulties of the discursive terrain as a whole. Above all, it is hoped that, despite the limitations outlined above, the reader will find the thesis provides a thorough and absorbing understanding of contemporary perceptions, constructions and implications of mixedness in the UK and USA.

## Chapter 2:

### Mixed Race Projects: The 'First Wave'

*[Children of a white man and a black woman] are neither white nor black, neither French nor African, neither curly-haired nor straight. Unfortunately, they are something nonetheless.*

Albert Londres, *Terre d'ébène: La traite des Noirs* (1929) cited in (Sollors, 1999; p2)

*What's the deal with Mariah anyway – black, white, I mean, what the hell is she?*

Scott Capurro, The Broadway Studio, Catford, May 2002

### Introduction

If comedian Scott Capurro caught Mariah Carey's interview on CNN, it may be that his confusion over the singer's racial identity has since been resolved. With a half-black Venezuelan father and a white Irish-American mother, Carey, as she told the Larry King audience, considers herself multiracial.<sup>10</sup> Yet, although Carey clearly answered the question, is her answer clear enough? Despite a growing tendency in the UK and the USA for those in the public eye, such as Carey, and those outside it to define themselves as mixed race or multiracial, Capurro's what's-the-deal reaction to the chosen identity of such people is, if not necessarily the norm, then normal enough. Although 660,000 people recently officially identified as 'Mixed'<sup>11</sup> in the 2001 UK Census and 6.8 million Americans acknowledged their 'multiracial' background by ticking two or more races in the US 2000 Census<sup>12</sup>, the frequent probing and prodding that these identities receive suggest that, for some and on some level, such identities don't quite make sense. Yet, if it also holds, as Albert Londres believed, that the bearers of these identities are 'neither-nor', must not the grudging 'something nonetheless' be acknowledged? If so, the key question, then, is what is this 'something nonetheless'? What does it mean if you are 'neither-nor'? What does it mean to be mixed race?

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<sup>10</sup> *CNN Larry King Live*, Interview with Mariah Carey, aired December 19<sup>th</sup> 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Office for National Statistics, [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

<sup>12</sup> Source: CensusScope, [www.censusscope.org](http://www.censusscope.org); however, as shall be discussed in Chapter 4 and as CensusScope itself points out, with hundreds of possible combinations, the Census 2000 multiracial data is often inscrutable.



If, as Henriques has pointed out, the mixing of races has been a social and sexual phenomena throughout the history of the world (Henriques. 1974: ix), is it futile to attempt to define mixedness? How are we to draw together all these ‘mixes’ into coherent explanations? A definition which aims to encompass the contemporary and historical global totality of mixed race individuals seems as ineffective an attempt as those nineteenth century tables of race which worked to label people by fractional quotas of ‘blood’.<sup>13</sup> As Olumide has rightly noted, mixed race ‘is not indicative of a rigid set of experiences which all those to whom the term ‘mixed race’ (or some variation) is applied experience uniformly’ (Olumide, 2002; p4). However, as she also observes, whilst mixed race may not be a uniform experience, there are ‘common experiences over time and space of those who have been socially defined as mixed or mixing race’ that are familiar to what she labels the ‘mixed race condition’ (Olumide, 2002; p4). Thus, if a neat, orderly definition of mixed race might lie beyond our grasp, an understanding of the ways in which mixed race is lived, how it is produced and why most certainly is not. With mixedness clearly emerging as a key issue for individuals, groups and governments of the UK and the USA, it is timely to attempt to understand its perceptions, constructions and implications in the two countries. As such, the question then becomes how we can draw together or differentiate between mixed race patterns and experiences? How can we ‘theorise’ mixed race?

### **Theorising mixed race**

As Christian points out, theorising mixed race is ‘fraught with conceptual complexities’ (Christian, 2000; p18). Depending on the interplay of socio-cultural, historical, political and economic factors in various geographical and temporal locations, it is possible for the concept of mixed race to be interpreted in all manner of formations. The challenge, then, is to try to negotiate a path through these inextricably interwoven complexities to map the commonalities of the mixed race condition whilst recognising the specificity of the context it refers to. Thus, as argued previously, whilst there are important distinctions to be made

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<sup>13</sup> For an example of these types of tables, see Oscar Falconi, ‘Where’s America’s Gene Pool Heading?’ <<http://www.nutri.com/wn/gp.html>>

between conceptualisations of mixed race in different temporal and geographical locales, there are yet patterns that are common to the meaning of mixedness as a whole. These are what Sollors has dubbed the *themes* of ‘interracialism’ – the phenomena of racial mixing as well as the mix itself, (Sollors, 2000). Whilst many of these themes – such as marginalisation, confusion and passing, for example – have been identified over the years as forming common elements of the mixed race condition, there has been a lack of focus both in attempting to draw these themes coherently together and to explain them as processes rather than as ‘facts’. As Christian perceptively remarks, ‘arguably, the key point in theorising multiracial identity is to note how social theorists have tended to focus on either macro or micro determinants. However, a more productive task would be to understand the implications of both’ (Christian, 2000: p18). In order to further understanding of mixedness then, it is necessary to examine the ways in which it is recognised, contested and reproduced, both at the personal and wider societal level. Thus, whilst a new emphasis, particularly in the USA, on the mixed race voice has challenged former pathological conceptualisations of mixedness, the current preoccupation with the ‘experience’ of mixed race individuals is in many ways beginning to obscure the role of larger social processes in reflecting, shaping and challenging mixedness. Moreover, as is also astutely noted by Christian, the accompanying lack of concentration on the historical terrain involved in producing ideas of mixedness is also limiting understandings of it. As the landscape of the historical terrain has significant bearing on the way in which mixedness is conceptualised today, a socio-historical focus is of paramount importance as, devoid of roots, there is a danger that understandings of mixedness will fall into a ‘naïve’ analysis that posits interracialism as a new phenomenon (Christian, 2000).

What is required then is an analytical model which attempts to join the personal and the societal that is, a model which understands the racialisation process of mixedness through identifying the socio-historical basis of contemporary patterns, whilst acknowledging and incorporating the experiences of mixed race, and other, voices. The central theoretical position of this thesis is that this complex process of understanding mixedness is best done so through a ‘mixed race project’ approach.



## Mixed Race Projects

Whilst it is not the only means by which to understand the division of humanity into ‘types’, the concept of race, as the American sociologists Omi and Winant (1994) argue, persists in playing a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world. The challenge for theory, they continue, is to explain this situation, which they attempt to do using the concept of *racial formation*. As briefly explained in Chapter 1, this consists of understanding the creation, habitation, transformation and destruction of racial categories through a process of historically situated projects where human bodies and social structures are represented and organised under and through the larger hegemonic ordering and ruling of society as a whole (Omi & Winant, 1994). Such projects, argue Omi and Winant, vary widely in scope and effect and take place both on the macro level – in terms, for example, of large-scale public action, state activities, and interpretations of racial conditions in artistic, journalistic, or academic fora – as well on the micro level of the countless number of racial judgments and practices that are carried out in terms of individual experience and interaction (Omi & Winant, 1994; pp60-61). The ‘racial projects’, which do the ideological work of linking these micro and macro structures and representations, are ‘simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganise and redistribute resources along particular racial lines’ (Omi & Winant, 1994; pp55-6). Racial formation theory thus attempts to synthesise the interaction of these racial projects on a society-wide level in order to situate them historically (and, it should be argued, geographically) and highlight the complex process by which race is understood by society as well as the way in which it structures society.

Adapting this theory of racial formation, it is proposed that patterns of the ‘mixed race condition’ can be understood by use of what it called in this thesis ‘mixed race projects’. Modifying Omi and Winant’s idea of racial projects, which they define as understanding ‘what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning’ (Omi & Winant, 1994; p56), it is argued that the concept of mixed race is best understood by similarly asking what it

means discursively and how it is organised structurally, at both the personal and socio-political level. Whilst acknowledging once more the criticisms levelled at the failure of racial formation theory to develop an alternative 'non-essentialised' theoretical and analytical framework for understanding 'race', (Miles & Torres, 1999; Kivisto, 2003), it is argued here that, in terms of highlighting the overlooked processes that work to 'racialise' mixedness, the framework of synthesising historically and geographically specific mixed race projects provided by racial formation theory is incredibly useful. Primarily, it enables us to begin thinking about not only the production of the representation and the structural organisation of mixed race by the racial formation processes of the UK and USA but also what the implications of these representations and organisation are on the racial formation processes themselves. However, although the aim of this thesis is to use racial formation theory as a tool for understanding mixedness and not to discuss its merits as an analytical concept within the social sciences, it is worthwhile noting that, similarly to Miles and Torres (1999), that the concept of racial formation is better employed in the sense of 'racialised formation' in order not to exclude the concept of 'ethnicity', which is often produced and used similarly to 'race'. Thus, despite the use of the term 'racial formation' for reasons of clarity, this thesis employs the concept in terms of 'racialisation' in order to acknowledge the ways in which certain groups and individuals are conceptualised as being 'racially' or 'ethnically' different and the ideas that accompany these differences.

In light of its own usage of racial formation theory, this thesis consequently engages with mixed race as emerging from hegemonic orders that have promulgated the notions of racial superiority and racial inferiority, that is to say, the conceptualising of human groups as having inherent physical and cultural essences. As explained earlier, although the term racial is used here, ideas of ethnicity also apply if they have been constructed through the same essentialising processes of superiority and inferiority. Thus due to the ways in which the different ethnicities have been conceptualised, an ethnically mixed white English/Indian person growing up in England is much more likely to have to deal with notions of being 'mixed' than a person of white English/French ancestry –



possibly from both sides of his or her heritage. However, although the idea of mixed race is a consequence of notions of racial superiority and inferiority, the ways in which this has unfolded varies, due to the means by which social conflicts and interests premised on different conceptions of human difference are signified and symbolised (Omi and Winant, 1994: p55). Thus whilst all contemporary mixed race projects, whether in Brazil, South Africa, Hawaii etc. may be said to *emerge* from hegemonic racial orders that have created the premise of racial superiority and racial inferiority, all will ultimately be unique due to the socio-historical racial formation process of the particular context. However, despite their singular development, it is also the case that some mixed race projects will be more directly comparable or even similar to others, due to shared conceptualisations of these social elements and/or histories. In this respect, it is argued in this work that a focus on the contemporary UK mixed race project gains greatly from a simultaneous focus on the USA one due both to similarities in which the projects have been conceptualised and negotiated and the dialogue which is and has been in place. Whilst the differences between the projects which necessitate an individual focus will form the heart of later chapters, this chapter will present an analytical model to help synthesise the key perceptions, constructions and implications of mixedness in the two countries and demonstrate how and why contemporary UK and USA mixed race projects are formed and organised.

### **UK and US Mixed Race Projects**

As argued previously, UK and US mixed race projects consist of an intricately linked nexus of racial dynamics emerging from a hegemonic racial ordering that has largely pitted the superiority of ‘whiteness’ against the subordination of ‘blackness’ or ‘other’. Whilst the complex nature of the interaction between these dynamics is a challenging one to synthesise, the very focus on these relations – largely overlooked in analyses of mixedness so far – means that the framework of racial formation theory is particularly helpful in providing a means through which to navigate the terrain analytically. To this end, the case is made that it is not necessarily a question of identifying these dynamics systematically but of

identifying the key ways in which these dynamics have operated and do operate. As such, it is argued here that the key racial dynamics that work to produce notions of mixedness in the UK and the USA may be identified under the following three interconnected themes:

The representation of marginality

The articulation of impurity and purity

The hegemony of white family privilege

It is held that these three themes are able to encompass the key ways in which mixed race has been perceived and constructed in the UK and US contexts as well as illuminating the direction that new forms of engagement with mixedness are taking. Whilst the counter-conceptualisations and their implications shall be explored in later chapters, this chapter will discuss in further detail the key dynamics of and between the themes outlined which are crucial to an understanding of what is here dubbed the ‘first wave’ of understanding mixedness. This ‘first wave’, which conceptualised mixed race as a primarily pathological and undesirable state has long been the history of understanding mixedness in both the UK and the USA. As it covers such extensive temporal and geographical frameworks, the chapter will discuss the development of the ‘first wave’ according to the key themes, rather than presenting it as a linear story. Moreover, by discussing the ‘first wave’ thematically it is hoped that the important interaction between key racial dynamics in the production of mixedness will become clear. To this end, the following sections will argue that the representation of mixedness is largely premised on common perceptions of mixedness as a state of *marginality* which, it is argued, emerges from wider concepts of *purity* and *impurity*. Looking closely at the concept of impurity through which mixed race is generally articulated, a notion of *ambivalence* can be found around the impure concept of *hybridity*, specifically its *degenerative* and *vigorous* forms. This ambivalence is also demonstrated in the *exoticism* of the hybrid, which is linked to understandings of *sexuality* as emerge through the protection and maintenance of white family privilege (Zack, 1993).



*Miscegenation* is thus an expression of white family *boundaries* that have been transgressed threatening the hegemonic racial order of white privilege as a whole. With this privilege under threat, the racialised dimensions of whiteness and blackness are opened up as contested, negotiable spaces where new patterns of representation, articulation and hegemony related to the mixed race condition begin to form.

The following section starts first by exploring the representation of mixed race in the UK and USA in more detail. It argues that there is a long history of representing mixedness in the two countries as a marginal and troubled state, which has its main roots in the emergence of the tragic mulatto in nineteenth century American fiction and was concretised by the twentieth century sociological concept of ‘the marginal man’. It is also argued that, despite an increasing challenge to these representations (discussed further in chapter 3), the pervasive legacy of these representations is still in evidence today.

### ***The Representation of Marginality***

*A joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue.  
There is the babe, as loathsome as a toad  
Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime;  
The Empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal,  
and bids thee christen it with thy dagger's point.  
Nurse, Titus Andronicus, Act IV, II (lines 66-70)*

Although, thankfully, not all reactions are as extreme as the Empress's in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), those that navigate between concern, confusion and contempt as evinced by the Nurse in the same play have long been the story of mixed race in the UK and the USA. Though the ways in which it is represented differ, it is no exaggeration to say that the primary and long-standing perception of mixed race individuals has been to define them as a ‘sorrowful issue’. Though many mixed race people would beg to differ<sup>14</sup>, there is a long history of representation which has worked overwhelmingly to place them in this

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<sup>14</sup> Much of the biographical and autobiographical literature that has emerged over the last few decades on the mixed race experience shows that many mixed race people feel positively about their mixed heritages. See Gaskins (1995), Camper (1994), Funderburg (1994), Zack (1995).

position. Where mixed race is overtly recognised – and as we shall see, there are times when it is done so covertly – it has been viewed as a marginal state, where ideas of confusion, peripheral belonging, exclusion, rejection and unhappiness are seen as the overarching realities of the mixed race person's experience – enter, the 'tragic mulatto' and the 'marginal man'.

*Sorrowful issues: 'Tragic Mulattos' and 'Marginal Men'*

*[There are] adverse factors [in the heredity of 'half-castes'] which often involve not only disharmony of physical traits but disharmony of mental characteristics.*

R.M. Fleming, University School of Social Science meeting, 1927, cited in Rich, (1986) p131.

*Adolescents who identify more than 1 race are at higher health and behavior risks when compared to those who identify with 1 race only. This applies in a general way and is not distinctive to any race combinations. Further, it is not peculiar to any particular type of risk, but to most risks, both health and behavior.*

(Udry et al., 2003; p1869)

It is a popular conception that, in terms of racial and ethnic difference, the UK and the USA are more tolerant now than they have ever been.<sup>15</sup> On one side of the Atlantic, Tony Blair states that the overwhelming majority of British people share his vision of 'the great multi-racial tolerant Britain we are trying to build'<sup>16</sup> whilst on the other, George W. Bush asserts that 'one of the deepest commitments of America is tolerance. No one should be treated unkindly because of the color of their skin or the content of their creed'.<sup>17</sup> However, a commitment to, or vision of tolerance is far from the actual state of tolerance – or more importantly acceptance – that these and similar statements imply we are now in or on the verge of. Indeed, whilst media and academic reports tell us that interracial relationships are on the increase, this aspect of multicultural societies tends to stretch the bounds of tolerance for many. Blair's hopes for a tolerant

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<sup>15</sup> For example, a recent poll in *The Times* found that, overall, young Britons 'want more immigration, have close friends of a different colour, and would almost all be prepared to marry someone of a different race'. This contrasts, however, with a recent survey conducted by the CRE across all age groups, which found that nine out of ten white Britons had no or hardly any minority ethnic friends. *The Times*, 14 September, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Speech by the British Prime Minister at the 'Pride of Britain' awards, London, 20 May 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Remarks by the American President at Iftar Dinner, The White House, 7 November 2002.



Britain, for example, is let down by ongoing incidents of violent physical and verbal attacks for many who have exogamous relationships.<sup>18</sup> However, opposition to racial mixing does not only take these expressly racist forms. One of the main ways in which hostility to mixed marriages has been voiced over supposedly more racially tolerant decades is through the ‘what about the children?’ debate. A letter to the ‘Moral Muse’ section of *The Observer* newspaper illustrates this common view of interracialism, which uses concern for the welfare of the children to oppose mixed unions:

*My fiancé and I plan to marry next May. We have been together for three years. He is Afro-Caribbean and I am white. My father, who is 72, is opposed to our marriage. He feels it would be unfair to bring up a child of mixed-race. I love my fiancé, but does my father have a point? Is it unfair to bring a mixed-race child into the world?*<sup>19</sup>

The idea that it is ‘unfair’ to have mixed race children can be discerned in many debates and discussions around interracialism. The idea that such children are likely to inhabit a ‘disharmonious’ state which puts them ‘at risk’ can be glimpsed in many strands of popular and social scientific thought. When asked about the controversial decision to implant a white woman’s egg into a black woman to ensure that the child resembled its white father and thus escaped the stigma of ‘mixedness’, the director of a British fertility clinic replied:

*We would seriously think about it. There are merits in having an all-white or all-black child. In my view it is not right, but it is a fact of life that being half-caste is not as easy as being white or black, and I believe this couple may well have been acting in the child’s interests.’*<sup>20</sup>

Premised on an emotional plea to interracial couples to think twice about the consequences of their relationship and spare their children a lifetime on the periphery, this contemporary conceptualisation of mixed race individuals as destined to inhabit a confused, mixed-up marginal state is not a recent

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<sup>18</sup> Alibhai-Brown in Tizard and Phoenix (2001). For some accounts of abuse suffered by interracial couples in the UK, see also *The Sunday Express*, 12 May 2002; *The Sunday Times*, 9 April 2000; *The Herald*, 7 December 2000; *The Mirror*, 2 September 1998. Also, the BBC2 documentary *Love Thy Neighbour*, aired 13 Aug 2003

<sup>19</sup> *The Observer*, 17 December 2000

<sup>20</sup> Dr Peter Brinsden, Bourn Hall fertility clinic, Cambridge. *The Independent*, 1 January 1994.

phenomenon but the legacy of a long history of perceptions of mixedness as a pathologically undesirable condition. Indeed, in order to fully understand the perception of mixed race individuals today, it is essential that the historical racial dynamics behind the representation of marginality are clearly comprehended. As such, it is argued in the forthcoming sections that the long dominant British and American representations of the mixed race person as tragically on the margins of society have their main roots in the figures of the American literary creation, 'the tragic mulatto', and its social scientific successor, 'the marginal man'.

### *The USA and the 'Tragic Mulatto'*

Although the 'tragic mulatto' emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, debates on interracialism had been going on in the United States from the time the first blacks landed in English America in 1619 (Mencke, 1979). Unlike in Latin America and the West Indies however, racial mixing never received the same widespread public acceptance. Whilst some parts of the Lower South, particularly in South Carolina and Louisiana where there was a 'mulatto elite',<sup>21</sup> proved the exception, on the whole, the colonial authorities took a strong stance against both casual interracial liaisons and marriage.<sup>22</sup> However, despite the harsh laws and penalties devised by the authorities throughout the colonial period, race mixing continued, if not unabashed then regardless, particularly between white men and black women.

During settlement and in the first century afterwards, debates on interracialism tended to focus more on interracial relationships than mixed race people, as reflected in the literature of the time. Whilst there were literary representations of mixed race people in America, and elsewhere, before the emergence of the tragic mulatto figure, they generally tended to be peripheral to the story (Sollors, 1999, p239). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that what Sollors calls the 'tragic mulatto complex' emerged (Sollors, 1999; p239) – that is, a variation on a series of events that lead a mixed black/white individual to a tragic ending.

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<sup>21</sup> The status of the 'mulatto elite' will be discussed further in chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup> Among the earliest surviving records of colonial Virginia are documents regarding the punishment of white men convicted of fornicating with black women (Mencke, 1979).



Whilst it has been argued that numerous historical developments facilitated its emergence (Sollors, 1999), the tragic mulatto is generally considered to be the product of the anti-abolitionist literature as exemplified by Richard Hildreth's *The White Slave* (1836), and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). As Bullock notes, pro-slavery apologists had almost entirely omitted (with so many other admissions) mention of what she calls 'concubinage'. However, if anti-slavery authors, in accordance with Victorian gentility, were wary of illustrating this practice, they made great use of its descended offspring to highlight the moral weakness of the South (Bullock, 1945). Yet, despite this new focus on the mixed race individual, only a minority of these writers were concerned with the actual social problems that such people faced – as partisans in national political issues, most authors were more concerned with highlighting the immorality of the South rather than attacking the illogical idiocy of racial superiority and inferiority as a whole. Indeed, many abolitionists had a very ambiguous attitude towards 'Negroes' – whilst campaigning for the Negro's right to be free, not all considered him or her a true equal. Thus what emerges overwhelming from the majority of the literature is not an accurate portrayal of a complex social situation, but what has proved to be a popular and enduring racial stereotype, emerging from the prejudices and projections of competing fears and desires provoked by the concepts of superior and inferior racial categories.

So who is the tragic mulatto? Whilst the tragic mulatto is not as simple a type as has often been portrayed (Sollors, 1999), there are enough recurring themes around the characters to allow a certain level of generalisation. We first then usually encounter the tragic mulatto as s/he emerged in Abolitionist fiction. Here the character most usually takes the form of the son or daughter of a Southern white gentleman (from whom the tragic mulatto's mental capacities and physical beauty are inherited) and one of his favourite slave mistresses; his/her life is fraught with difficulty after becoming a slave or outcast when either discovering his/her Negro heritage or losing the protection of the father after his death, resulting in occasional retreat and a leadership role in the black community or, more usually, nobly meeting his/her tragic death. Mostly the character was used to attack the South on this moral point of their ability to sell their children into

slavery; as such these characters tended to be tragic 'octoroons' rather than mulattos, that is, 'near-whites' who had 'one-eighth of black blood'. The real purpose behind the focus on the octoroon in the literature is debatable (Sollors, 1999) but it has been strongly argued that by emphasising the tragedy of the near-white octoroon, more sympathy for abolition would be elicited amongst the white readership. Whatever the intricacies of form and purpose of this literature, it is nevertheless clear that it cast the mould for the representation of mixed race individuals in literary and popular thought.

The several variations on this mould all owe their emergence to the original abolitionist model, albeit with modified elements depending on the message being transmitted. Thus, the abolitionist tragic mulatto was quickly followed by the anti-Negro tragic mulatto of late reconstruction fiction; here the backlash against emancipation meant that the figure took on a much more unsympathetic guise, and in works by the likes of Thomas Dixon, the mulatto was portrayed as either a corrupter of white gentlemen, a despoiler of white women and usurper of political power (Bullock, 1945). Here the warning of mixing 'civilised' with 'savage' blood was clearly demonstrated, – the mulatto was unable to calm the beast within to the destruction of him/herself and innocent whites around. These caricatures were counter-attacked by the emergence of the pro-Negro tragic mulatto figure who was frequently, but not always, the product of black authored fiction. Here, the always handsome or beautiful mulatto was tragic only as long as s/he failed to cast in her lot with the black group. If, as almost inevitably the characters in these works did, s/he identified solely as 'black', a life of respect and leadership was the reward (Mencke, 1979; Sollors, 1999; Sollors, 2000). As will be discussed further in chapter 7, this slightly different take on the tragic mulatto has a fundamental part to play in the conceptualisation and implications of mixedness amongst and for contemporary 'black' debates on the politics of mixed race people, particularly amongst African-Americans.

Whatever the position these literary stances took, in all forms the overarching perception of the mixed race person was based around the tragedy of his/her mixedness— resolution could only come as a release from the mulatto state, whether by death or unity with black community. What is particularly critical in



this sphere of the racial dynamics of mixedness is the overwhelming conceptualisation of the tragic mulatto – and consequently mixedness – in the USA as a matter of ‘black’ and ‘white’. This is not to say that other permutations of the tragically mixed person did not exist. The ‘half-blood’ Native-American/white figure was also evident in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature as was the Chinese or Japanese/white ‘Eurasian’ and both were susceptible to the same stereotyping of marginality and tragedy as the mulatto (Scheick, 1979; Kim, 1982; Wu, 1982). The difficulty of their existence and the common tragic death of all the variations of these mixed race figures served the function of both highlighting the dangers of interracial mixing as well as resolving the social dilemma posed by their existence (Scheick, 1979). Nevertheless, despite the similarities in their tragic state, it was the mulatto with which both American popular, literary and scientific imagination became fixated. Bearing in mind the criticism levelled at some who have discussed the representation of racialised groups as a ‘who had/has it the worst game’ (Baird-Olson, 2003: p201), it could yet be argued that the greater fascination in the USA with the tragic mulatto is a consequence of the historical processes that conceptualised blackness as so essentially and overwhelmingly inferior and whiteness as so superior, meaning that not only is the boundary between white and black perceived to be of a greater difference than between other groups, but that the crossing of that boundary – of which the mulatto is the evidence – is even more shocking.

As little comparative work has been done on the different attitudes to the ‘tragically mixed’ state, such a hypothesis is offered tentatively. However, it is argued forcefully that the attributes of and elements that surround the figure of the tragic mulatto – marginality, unhappiness, deception, confusion, rejection – are not only present in the other ‘tragically mixed’ forms but persist in contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness, both in the USA and the UK. Indeed, whilst the tragic mulatto in one of his or her original guises makes fewer and fewer appearances in American literary or cinematic life – the original archetypes did however remain popular until well into the 1950s with cinematic melodramas such as *Imitation of Life* (1934) and (1959), *Pinky*, (1949), the Natalie Wood vehicle *Kings Go Forth* (1958), and the British made *Sapphire*

(1959) – the legacy that the habitation of a mulatto state is unhealthy and undesirable has lasted. A viewer of an episode of a feature on ‘biracial teens’ on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* commented:

*On Tuesday, Oprah had Mariah Carey and her mother on her show to talk about how hard it is to be biracial. The spin seemed to be that it is tragic to be mixed. They had a piece by newswoman Ann Curry who claimed it was great to be biracial (she’s Japanese and Caucasian) but Oprah dismissed this by claiming it is a whole different thing to be black and white. Before a commercial break, Oprah asked the "What about the children?" question. When she came back and put a question like this to Mariah's mom, mom admitted that she had been naive about the issues going into her marriage (in 1960) but Oprah cut her off as she was about to continue with further (probably more positive) observations. The question was never answered but the tone of the show suggested that biracial kids have it very tough and thank God that they can look to Mariah as a role model of someone who made it, despite her mulatto status. I wrote to Oprah to tell her we've had enough of the tragic mulatto stories.<sup>23</sup>*

However, the legacy of the tragic mulatto complex is not just confined to the USA. The pathological conceptualisations of ‘the ‘first wave’’ can be found also in the UK.

### *Britain and the ‘Half-Caste’*

The legacy of the conflictual state of the tragic mulatto has also proved to be a familiar perception of mixed race individuals in Britain (Wilson, 1987; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002; Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Olumide, 2002). In an interview conducted for a recent study on the educational experiences of British mixed race pupils, a teacher commented:

*Generally the ones that you've seen today [are] the ones who haven't got problems. But a lot of the mixed heritage do have...it's just to do with identity.*

(Tikly, Caballero & Haynes, 2004; p50)

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<sup>23</sup> Comments on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, broadcast 9 November 1999, posted to the Internet magazine *The Multiracial Activist* on 12 November 1999 <[www.multiracial.com](http://www.multiracial.com)>. *Oprah* is seen by an estimated 23 million viewers a week in the United States, is broadcast internationally in 107 countries, and is the highest-rated talk show in television history. <[www.oprah.com](http://www.oprah.com)>



However, what needs to be understood about British mixed race projects is that whilst this notion of the tragic mulatto has been influential in the conceptualisation of contemporary projects, this notion was not only borrowed directly from the American model, but became influential at a later date. Whilst there is very little work done specifically on the history of mixed race in the UK prior to the twentieth century, there is evidence to suggest that mixed race was initially conceptualised quite differently in Britain. Despite the convergence of the pathological understandings of mixedness that allows us to talk in terms of an Anglo-American ‘first wave’ of conceptualising mixedness, there are key differences in the racial formation processes of the two countries which have significant consequences for the ways in which their contemporary mixed race projects are playing out. Whilst these differences will be discussed in depth in chapters 6 and 7, let us focus for the moment on the construction of ‘the ‘first wave’’ in the British context.

Despite the popular conception that the black presence in Britain is a late twentieth century phenomenon, there have been significant black populations in Britain as far back as the sixteenth century, if not earlier.<sup>24</sup> By the 1770s, the black population in Britain, mostly domestic servants and seafarers, numbered between 10,000 to 15, 000<sup>25</sup> most of whom were widely concentrated in London (Fryer, 1985; p68) and, considering the huge gender imbalance in favour of black males, it is hardly surprising that interracial relationships began to occur, especially amongst the lower classes who, black and white, were thrown together into a highly similar economic position (Walvin, 1973). Whilst, unlike in America, there was an absence of strict laws against interracial marriage,<sup>26</sup> the process of racial mixing was however quite frequently discussed in eighteenth century Britain. Although there were those who found it distinctly objectionable – the journalist William Cobbett wrote at the turn of the nineteenth century that a ‘shocking’ number of English women were prepared to accept not only black

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<sup>24</sup>There is considerable evidence to suggest that there was a black presence in England well before the colonial area, as far back as Roman Britain. See Gundara and Duffield (1992).

<sup>25</sup> The general population of England and Wales at the time has been estimated at 9 million (Fryer, 1985; p68).

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, a strict marriage bar operated in the mid-eighteenth century, not against blacks and whites but against Irish Catholics and English Protestants (Lorimer, 1978: p27).

lovers, but much worse, black husbands (Lorimer. 1978. p30) – as in America, such disapproval did not halt interracial liaisons amongst all classes. Like the working masses, the white British middle and upper-classes engaged in both furtive sexual encounters and more respectable liaisons with servants and free blacks and, contrary to American patterns, it appears that relationships between black men and white women of not only the lower but also of the middle and upper classes, was a far from infrequent occurrence (Lorimer. 1978). Without wishing to claim that it was the norm, there is evidence enough to suggest that it was generally not frowned upon – indeed, as Henriques points out, any equivocation towards such unions tended to be tied more to a particular English sense of class transgression rather than that of racial boundaries (Henriques. 1974).

As in America, there was not a great deal of focus on mixed race people themselves during this time, although that is to not say that they were completely absent from public thought or, more importantly, that superior and inferior concepts of racialisation were lacking – Captain Philip Thicknesse comments in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that, ‘nay, in almost every village are to be seen a little race of mulattoes, mischievous as monkeys, and infinitely more dangerous’ (Henriques, 1974, p134). However, until very late into the nineteenth century, the identity and nature of the mulatto, as distinguished from the Negro, was not of great concern to the British – indeed, British literature in the mid-nineteenth century lacked the obsession with the tragic mulatto figure that its American counterpart displayed. Indeed, the rare appearance of mixed race individuals in British literature saw them feature mainly as wealthy West Indian heiresses who, at least superficially, were accepted by British society. Thus, whilst the portrayals of Miss Lamb in Austen’s unfinished novel *Sanditon* (1817) and particularly Miss Schwartz in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848) are not exactly positive or flattering, being used largely as comic props with which to demonstrate the cupidity of society, there is no sense of tragedy here (Tizard and Phoenix, 2001: p27).<sup>27</sup> Whilst, as shall be discussed shortly, this general lack of

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<sup>27</sup> Whilst two famous characters in nineteenth century novels – Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1846) have been perceived or interpreted as tragic



interest in mixed race people did not continue, the tragic mulatto did not exist in mid-nineteenth century British literature, at least not to a notable degree.<sup>28</sup> Even with the introduction of the tragic mulatto to Britain through the popularity of Abolitionist American works,<sup>29</sup> there were no immediate attempts to reproduce the figure in British literature. It would not be until the crystallisation of racist attitudes under the fist of imperialism that the mulatto – or more accurately, the half-caste – would become a focus of British literary and popular thought.

The age of wondrous technical and scientific innovations, the nineteenth century saw Britain emerge as a leading world power and a force to be reckoned with. As Britain's prestige increased, so too did the belief in her white subjects' superiority over 'the dark races' who, it was commonly believed, were deficient in 'the grand qualities which distinguish man from the animal'.<sup>30</sup> With imperialism in full swing by the end of the century, white British attitudes towards the 'dark races' became more openly and unashamedly aggressive. As the black population began to diminish and become ghettoised throughout the nineteenth century, due mainly to abolition and emancipation (Henriques, 1974), blacks were considered more and more as 'different'. As a consequence, even the once neglected far-flung reaches of the Empire came under the critical eye of the new race thinking. Not only had a reaction begun to set in against the liberal espousal of the West Indian racial model which had always implied a certain amount of race mixing (Rich, 1990, p52), but even the cultural worth of India, which had hitherto conquered 'the European imagination', resulting in a surprising degree of 'Indianisation' amongst British settlers, began to be reassessed (Dalrymple, 2002). The Mutiny of 1857 had shaken and angered British self-opinion and by the 1890s, the belief in an inherently racial divide between Indians and the British was just as widespread as that between the British and any other dark race (Rich, 1990). The literature of the day began to

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mulattos (Heywood, 2001; Rhys, 1968) as there is no *direct* reference to their mulatto status by the authors, they cannot be considered as prime examples of the archetype.

<sup>28</sup> There is very little research done in this field and it may well be that future historical studies on the representation of the mulatto in nineteenth century Britain will reveal new findings.

<sup>29</sup> Beecher Stowe was invited to the British Isles in 1853 and greeted enthusiastically, returning twice more later in the decade. [www.harrietbeecherstowe.org](http://www.harrietbeecherstowe.org)

<sup>30</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Man* (1862), cited in Henriques (1974), p24.

reflect disapproval of crossing racial boundaries, the evidence of its consequent dangers being the untrustworthy, despised, unhappy figure of the 'half-caste' as featured in the works of Kipling, Conrad and other lesser known writers of the imperial age.<sup>31</sup> With the preoccupation with India after the Mutiny, it is not surprising that the majority of 'half-castes' in the British literature of the time tended to be 'Eurasian' rather than the 'mulatto' of 'American fiction. However, as the Empire began to crumble and a black, working class Caribbean population began to make its presence felt once more in Britain (Rich, 1990), race not only became less of an overseas and more of a domestic concern but 'blackness' became once again a greater threat than 'Asianness'. With racial hierarchies becoming more entrenched as the middle classes 'found a convenient substitute for the family of blood relationship of the traditional aristocracy in a common identity as members of the Anglo-Saxon race' (Lorimer, 1978; p113), the undesirability of the 'half-caste', particularly black/white individuals, grew as the twentieth century took shape. Indeed, even when the outlandish claims of Victorian scientific race thought which had informed much of the objections to racial mixing began to lose their foothold, the academic stamp of approval was still supplied, in Britain as in America, in the form of the 'marginal man'.

### *The 'Marginal Man'*

Whilst the tragic mulattos and half-castes of popular thought continued to flourish in novel form well into the early twentieth century, the biological explanations of innate differences between the races that had informed them were beginning to lose their credibility in academic circles.<sup>32</sup> Led by the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago, social scientific attitudes about the question of race began to be reshaped. With increasing immigration and new concern over the idea of racial amalgamation, the idea of the 'melting pot' became of growing interest in America. It was in this climate that the mulatto came under new scientific scrutiny.

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, Kipling's *Beyond the Pale* (1899), *Kim* (1901); Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (1895); *Lord Jim*, (1900).

<sup>32</sup> For an account of the emergence of scientific racism and its retreat, see Stepan (1982).



Whilst E.B. Reuter's study of *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918) can be considered the cornerstone of pre-World War I efforts to understand the place of mixed race people in America and the true consequences of racial amalgamation (Mencke, 1978; p78), it was a Chicago School colleague, Robert E. Park, whose work would have a greater impact on the perception of mixed race. through his introduction of the concept of the 'marginal man' in 1928.

The 'marginal man' as defined by Park was a concept used to describe what he saw as the 'relatively permanent' period of crisis of a person who lives 'in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less a stranger'. Such individuals, according to Park, were ordinarily, but not necessarily, of 'mixed blood' but whether immigrant or racially mixed they were all likely to exhibit the same characteristics – 'spiritual instability, intensified self-consciousness, restlessness and *malaise*' (Park, 1928, p893). However, Park did concede that this wasn't an entirely negative state, indeed it was one that also offered certain advantages – due to their marginal status, he argued, the 'marginal men' were often able to develop a certain sophistication and keen intellectual interest, a cosmopolitan outlook on life (Park, 1928). These arguments of Park are thus a step removed from the hysterical explanations of tragedy and disorder due to the mixing of blood which dominated earlier popular and scientific viewpoints (Mencke, 1979). However, despite his emphasis on the role of cultural and social factors on what he called 'the mentality of the hybrid', Park, like Reuter before him, continued to subscribe to the pervasiveness of the racial attitudes of the era, which posited the 'Negro' as inferior and the white as superior.

Indeed, such attitudes would prove hard to dispel. The positive aspect of marginality as defined by Park was overshadowed by the subsequent elaboration of the 'marginal man' by his colleague Everett Stonequist who saw little to commend in the marginal situation. According to Stonequist, marginality was a three phased life cycle: mixed race individuals passed from a state of semi or full blown ignorance about their difference from the dominant group, through to psychological maladjustment through some act of rejection, before attempting to 'adjust' through passing into the dominant group, assimilating into the black

group or choosing to remain marginal (Stonequist, 1937). Whatever the decision, all three choices, asserted Stonequist, were fraught with psychological difficulty. Whilst this theory was based more on personal observations rather than genuine empirical research (Tizard and Phoenix, 2000; p45) and informed by popular notions of mixed race individuals as endlessly played out in the tragic mulatto literature, Stonequist's research nevertheless gained great currency. What is interesting here is that, despite the initial emphasis by Park on social environment, through Stonequist, the focus gradually turned inwards onto the mixed race individual. This negative prognosis of the 'between two cultures' state as defined by Stonequist would replace Park's ambivalence as the cornerstone for enquiry into mixed race on both sides of the Atlantic for years to come. As studies of race gradually shifted focus from biology to identity in the mid-twentieth century, the psychological marginality and confusion of those of mixed race became a normative concept in both American and British social scientific circles.

Indeed, the marginality approach to mixed race identity had – and continues to have – a great influence over the way in which mixed race has been conceptualised in Britain. Within the handful of British studies on mixed race people, or rather children, that have been carried out in the mid to late twentieth century, Stonequist's legacy is clear: most imply or conclude that mixed race children are 'typical marginal men' who suffer critical identity problems (Wilson, 1987). However, the positioning of mixedness as a psychologically undesirable state is not solely drawn from the American tradition – Britain too has its own tradition of social scientific thinking which provoked this opinion.

As argued previously, the issue of race and colour gradually shifted at the very end of the nineteenth century from being an imperial one to a domestic one due to the re-emergence of black communities (Rich, 1990; p120). Consequently, the issue of black and white 'half-caste' children found itself a serious topic of investigation. Stepping into the field, the concept of eugenics – hereditary improvement of the human race by controlled selective breeding as first proposed by Sir Francis Galton in 1892 – packaged the earlier, looser and often fantastical theories of the biological discordance of mixed race people into a



tighter scientific package. People of mixed race, it was argued, inherited adverse hereditary factors, opening them up to all sort of physical and mental disorders<sup>33</sup>. The rise of this movement which swept Britain (and America) with an almost religious fervour in the early part of the twentieth century meant that, for the first time, people of mixed race were significantly seen in Britain as having characteristics ‘distinct from, and even more undesirable than, those of black people’ (Tizard and Phoenix, 2001; p33). Thus, as Rich expertly illustrates, a ‘half-caste pathology’ dominated discussions on race in parts of England by the 1930s. The outrage expressed in the media over the ‘hundreds of half-caste children with vicious tendencies’ running loose in Cardiff and other ports led to several investigations into this ‘national problem’ (Rich, 1990; p131). Whilst both the eugenics movement and the moral panic over the half-caste problem began to run out of steam as the implications of certain racialisation processes emerging from the Second World War hit Britain, the disharmony of the mixed race condition was firmly entrenched in the British psyche. This, added to the notion of marginality which had been introduced from the States, meant that, in both popular and social scientific thought, mixedness was an inherently problematic state. It is only recently, as the next chapter will demonstrate, that this approach has been questioned.

As we have seen so far, the representation of the mixed race person as a confused, marginal individual not only has a long history in both the UK and the USA, but the legacy of the pathological conceptualisation of the ‘first wave’ continues to shape contemporary notions of mixedness. The next step then, in our examination of UK and US mixed race projects, is to look more closely at the discursive meaning behind these representations. As such, the following section focuses on the articulation of purity and impurity that directly or indirectly accompanies and informs the ways in which mixedness is perceived and constructed.

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<sup>33</sup> See earlier quote by R. M. Fleming.

## The Articulation of Impurity and Purity

*Steve: You wouldn't call a man a white man that had Negro blood in him, would you?*

*The Sheriff: No, I wouldn't; not in Mississippi. One drop of Negro blood makes you a Negro in these parts!*

*Showboat (1936)*

As previously illustrated, the history of mixed race is notable for its representation in terms of marginality. However, parallel to this portrayal, there has paradoxically run a representation of mixed race which has not recognised it at all: the concept of hypodescent or, as more commonly known, the 'one-drop' rule.

As shall subsequently be discussed further, the 'one-drop' rule has had a pivotal place in the organisation of mixed race projects – indeed as later chapters will demonstrate, with its paradoxical logic which states that a white mother can have a black child but a black mother cannot have a white child, it continues to have significant repercussions for the politics of mixed race today. Before tackling its racially political significance, however, it is important to look more closely at its role within the larger mixed race projects. It is argued that in the following section that hypodescent is the articulation of purity and impurity, whose stream of thought underlies and accompanies the representation of marginality.

### *Impurity*

As illustrated earlier, whilst neither the authorities, popular thought or scientific pronouncement managed to halt the flow of interracial mixing since the time of the black presence arrived in the UK and USA,<sup>34</sup> there were yet vicious objections to this process. In the late eighteenth century Edward Long, an English man of property and respected historian of the time was one of the most vituperative critics of the time:

*The lower class of women in England, are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the laws permitted them. By these*

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<sup>34</sup> See earlier footnote on Gundara and Duffield (1992).



*ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus, in the course of a few generations more, the English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture, and from the chances, the ups and downs of life, this alloy may spread so extensively, as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of the people, till the whole nation resembles the Portuguese and Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. This is a venomous and dangerous ulcer that threatens to disperse its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it.*  
(Cited in Fryer, 1984; pp157-8)

Long's diatribe, along with similar historical British and American counterparts, is interesting for many reasons. As well as the more subtle underlying fears and prejudices regarding sexuality, which shall be returned to later, what emerges clearly is a horror of impurity, both in terms of contamination of the family and in his conceptualisations of mixed race people themselves. On both counts, this idea was spawned from wider ideas that had developed about the Negro. Despite actual contact with the sizeable black population which resided in Britain by the end of the eighteenth century, the influence of several centuries of popular myths and fallacies about the Negro proved extremely difficult to shake off. Moreover, a black/white dichotomy which had occurred long before the English met people whose skins were darker had insidiously permeated Enlightenment thought, perpetuating the idea of blacks as the physical manifestation of unfavourable primordial and spiritual notions of darkness, and whites as everything which was antithetical to this concept (Fryer, 1984).

With the American colonialists also believing in this black/white dichotomy, it is in this light that attitudes towards racial mixing must be considered. In the staging of black as bad and white as good, what interracial relationships meant for many was thus the mixing of the 'superiority of purity' with the 'inferiority of impurity'.

The merging of two seemingly non-combinative elements caused a great deal of confusion (and of course, continues to do so), particularly in terms of the product of such a merger. How, the colonialists on both sides of the Atlantic wondered, were they to make sense of this phenomenon? It was clearly happening, despite the protestations of scientifically inclined individuals that the offspring of black/white unions were generally sterile (Stepan, 1982, p105). Over the last four centuries, British and American popular and scientific thought, as has already

begun to be illustrated, dealt with the situation. if not in different ways. then at different times. switching back and forwards between viewing mulattos as separate from the Negro, due to the influx of white blood. and yet seeing them as the same as the Negro due to the influx of black blood. Consequently, what is apparent is that, due to the theory of hypodescent, whether seen as mulatto or seen as Negro, mixed race people were always conceptualised as impure. Whether it was a case of many, several or just the one drop, black blood was always potent enough to make the pure white into the impure 'other'.

The idea of blood is fundamental to the way in which mixedness has been conceptualised and articulated in the UK and USA. Whilst polygenist beliefs about the differing origins of blacks and whites led to some truly fantastical notions regarding the 'structural maladjustments' of mixed race people in the nineteenth century (Dover, 1937; p32) – Charles Davenport excitedly reported that 'some of the Jamaican browns have the long legs of the Negro and the short arms of the white which would put them at a disadvantage in picking things up from the ground' (in Dover, 1937; p33) – the notion of 'bad' and 'mixed' blood was more soberly accepted. Although the polygenist argument lost its power after Darwin's groundbreaking evolutionary theory was published in 1859, the inferiority ascribed to the Negro as a different species lived on through the idea of his or her innately inferior 'blood'. The problem for the mulatto, it was generally agreed as the nineteenth century advanced, was the conflict of blood – the clash between that of the 'civilised' European and that of the 'savage' African. Likewise, where other groups were similarly racialised, this conflict of blood also explained the difficult state of the mixed person – Native American and white mixed people have long been conceptualised in terms of 'half-bloods'. their civilised European heritage battling their noble, yet ultimately savage. Native American heritage (Wilson, 1992; Baird-Olson, 2003).<sup>35</sup> The Eurasian figures of both nineteenth century British literature and early twentieth century American literature was also frequently described as struggling to control the

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<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as shall be discussed further in later chapters, the idea of a 'blood quantum' to monitor the tribal membership was introduced by European settlers and is still used to control the amount of federal largesse available to this group (Wilson, 1992).



darker, baser instincts of their Asian blood (Nakashima, 2001). However, as argued previously, it was the black/white mixed race person, more than any other 'mix' that systematically dominated – and continues to dominate – the mixed racial projects of the USA and UK.

Whether a case of mental ability or emotional stability, the inevitable tension between the clash of heritages was what, ultimately, made the mulatto tragic. Even when the focus moved, as we have seen, from a biological sense of blood to a psychological focus on the mind, the mulatto was still cast as the 'victim of a divided inheritance', torn between reason and savagery (Brown, 1933: p279).

However, whilst the majority position on the divided inheritance of the mulatto during and post the nineteenth century was a negative one, there was yet a certain ambivalence towards the impurity of the mulatto as a whole, which was articulated in the diametrically opposite concepts 'hybrid degeneration' and 'hybrid vigour'. Again, the history of this articulation is a complex one, but as the debate about the mulatto emerged and developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, arguments over the inherently degenerative state of mixed race people – as physically weaker than the Negro and less intelligent than whites, or the inherently vigorous state – as combining the best of both races – occasionally ran in tandem. In answer to the rare protestations of people like the French anthropologist Paul Topinard who pointed out that, historically, miscegenation had been an important and essential force and, consequently, the majority of the world's populations were, largely, mixed race, nineteenth century opponents of miscegenation defended their position by making distinctions within the process: hence race crossing was either 'dysgenic' (between extremely disparate populations) or 'eugenic' (between highly similar ones) (Stepan, 1982: p105). Unsurprisingly, dysgenic black/white crossing was held to end in extremely disastrous results (the turbulent social and political situations of Latin America was frequently cited as proof of this), whilst eugenic race mixing – between, for example, 'Teutonic' and 'Saxon' stock – was claimed to be highly desirable for the 'advancement' of human civilisation.

The articulation of impurity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is thus quite plain to see. Whilst it continues to operate as a racial

dynamic, underlying the representation of marginality. distinct articulation of it as a contributing factor to the pathological positioning of mixedness is less obviously glimpsed in contemporary projects. However, that is not to say that it is not still present – the ‘first wave’ concept of degenerative and vigorous hybrid still exists although the degenerative form tends to be found primarily amongst far-right extremists who decry the inferior, polluted nature of mixed race people. Interesting, however, there is one discursive space where the articulation of degenerative impurity is still boldly represented: in the realms of science-fiction.<sup>36</sup> For example, even a cursory analysis of the *Star Trek*<sup>37</sup> universe shows that the theme of racial mixing is an important one. Each series of *Star Trek* has main, recurring or one-off ‘mixed species’ characters.<sup>38</sup> the half-human, half-Vulcan Spock being perhaps the most familiar. What is particularly interesting here is the way in which each of these characters displays in full the elements of marginal and impure representation and articulation that have been highlighted so far. As well as the female tragic mulatto figure of the half-Bajoran, half-Cardassian Tora Ziyal who only finds peace and acceptance in death, the half-Klingon/half human character of B’Leanna Torres and her one-fourth human daughter both experience the marginalisation and distrust from both parent races as does the marginal Klingon/human Alexander Roshenko. The superior ‘vigour’ of the mixed Spock and human/Betazoid Deanna Troi due to the merging of abilities of their parent races is equally offset by frequent expressions of despair by members of the parent races regarding their degenerative faults due to their lack of purity. With the ‘mixedness’ of these characters featuring regularly as the central or secondary storyline, the positing of mixed race as a problematic, ‘unnatural’ state, insidiously persists. The prevalence of similarly conceived

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<sup>36</sup> Within the reading of science fiction emerging as both a means to interpret and analyse trends in popular culture and the construction of ‘postmodern structures and identities’ Weldes (2003), Moylan (2003),<sup>36</sup> the concept of race is a prominent focus. For cultural critics, the ways in which the heavily featured ‘alien other’ of the future relates to and reflects the ‘social other’ of the now, can provide important insights into current conceptualisations of race and ethnicity as a whole.

<sup>37</sup> Although much has been written recently on the place of race in *Star Trek* (Pounds, 1999), the oldest and arguably most popular franchise to have emerged from the science fiction genre,<sup>37</sup> there is very little on the idea of mixed race in particular.

<sup>38</sup> With the exception of the latest instalment, *Enterprise*, which is set just after first contact between Earth and other species, which might explain this. However, it is only in its second series leaving room for a mixed species character later in its development.



‘mixed species’ characters in other popular science-fiction works means that the articulation of purity and impurity of the mixed race person continues explicitly.<sup>39</sup>

The vigorous hybrid is also very much in evidence, particularly in terms of the celebration of a particular type of multiculturalism which sees interracialism as the answer to racial harmony. Thus those who practise a certain form of ‘multiracial activism’ hail the superior beauty and cultural sophistication of mixed race people,<sup>40</sup> whilst others are less explicit but uphold the same idea. The Channel 4 programme *Human Mutants* referred to a 1993 *Newsweek Magazine* article in which the face of a ‘real’ racially mixed model – as opposed to the computer generated one of *Time* magazine – was held up as the ‘universal face of beauty’.<sup>41</sup> A geneticist interviewed in the programme to explain whether there was anything to ‘the commonly held belief that mixed race individuals are particularly attractive’, commented:

*There’s a sort of theory called the ‘optimal outbreeding theory’ which says you don’t want to breed too far away from your own genes because they might not complement each other well, but you don’t want to inbreed as well because inbreeding is a dangerous thing. You want to find somewhere in the middle to get you the best genetic make-up. So sometimes a mixed race individual might have a stronger genetic profile because you’re mixing the best of both worlds together.’<sup>42</sup>*

Whilst this may seem a more ‘positive’ attitude to mixedness, the conceptualisation that leads to the vigour of the hybrid is built from the same analytical material that also enables the hybrid to be cast as degenerative, as evinced by the supposed greater health risks they face as argued in the previously cited Udry study.

As later chapters will indicate, the articulation of impurity which has informed this conceptualisation of the hybrid features significantly in contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness and will be returned to in later chapters. To

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<sup>39</sup> See Small (2002) on the representation of racial purity and impurity in the half-human, half-vampire graphic novel and film character ‘Blade’.

<sup>40</sup> See far-right websites of the BNP and the KKK and those of multiracial activists such as <[www.mulattopeople.net](http://www.mulattopeople.net)>.

<sup>41</sup> *Newsweek Magazine*, November 2003.

<sup>42</sup> *Human Mutants*, aired on Channel 4, 21 June 2004.

continue here, the next section will consider the place of purity in the conceptualisation of mixedness, without which the positioning of impurity as the normative situation of the mixed race person would be impossible.

### *Purity*

If, as discussed earlier, ancient English ideas of the colour black had influenced Anglo-American attitudes towards black people, what place did notions of whiteness play in conceptualising whites? If blackness had been imagined as the colour of 'death, mourning, baseness, evil, sin and danger' then whiteness stood for 'purity, virginity, innocence, good magic, flags of truce, harmless lies and a perfect human beauty' (Fryer, 1984 p135). As both slavery in the USA and imperialism in the UK gathered momentum during the nineteenth century, these earlier fanciful imaginings began to crystallise into openly and aggressive racial 'facts' to justify the belief in white superiority over those who were seen to be lesser beings. Hence, Alfred Russell Wallace, one of the supposedly more moderate minded scientists on the race question, could assert in 1864 with little fear of contradiction that 'no one had denied that the Negro is very inferior in intellectual capacity to the European. The only question to be determined was, how far that inferiority extends.' (Lorimer, 1978; p141).

However, it appeared that the superiority of the white race did not make it invincible. There was one area in which whiteness seemed to be excessively delicate, the process of miscegenation. Against the fragile purity of whiteness, it would appear that the mark of blackness was not easily erased. Such was the strength of black blood that even one sixty-fourth was enough to render one black, despite protestations of ignorance or not. The obsession with white purity which emerged so violently in the course of the nineteenth century ensured that all and any products, no matter how distant, of mixing between white and other were impure. Paradoxically, as the importance of maintaining racial purity became one of the most debated and important scientific topics of the century, the Negro was relabelled as, if still lesser, then at least not a mongrel. Blackness, though an inferior state, was at least a pure one. As the twentieth century dawned, mulattos held the confusingly contradictory position of simultaneously



holding both an impure (mixed) and pure (black) status. In law and social mores, all Negroes, it seemed were black, but some Negroes were blacker than others. Or were they? The contradictory nature of racial logic meant that, particularly in the States, there were many white skinned people who were classified as black. By the same token, it was also the case that there were many so-called black people who 'passed' as white. Though the camouflaging of elements of one's identity is not confined to race, racial passing is a particular phenomenon of the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century (Sollors, 1997; p247). A product of the articulation of impurity and purity, passing is present whenever one group is deemed subordinate and denied the privileges available to the dominant majority. As Sollors points out, there are many typologies of passing, ranging from intentional to accidental, full-time, to occasional, concealed or conspiratorial (Sollors, 1997; p247).

Both the UK and USA have a long popular and literary tradition of accounts of passing – the construction of societies along the lines of the pure and the impure not only gives rise to the phenomenon of passing but also a fear and fascination with it. The same preoccupation and interest regarding racial purity and impurity that were documented in nineteenth and early twentieth century works such as James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), still continue to surface in contemporary mediums – a recent Channel 4 documentary *Britain's Slave Trade*, sought to trace the black ancestry of white Britons, to the evident discomfort of some of its participants.<sup>43</sup> That fundamental motif in the concept of the tragic mulatto which is the moment of revelation – the forced or unexpected disclosure of blackness in one whom most believe to be white – is further revealing for the fear of impurity that it implies. The attraction of the tragic mulatto for a white audience lies partly in the thrilling horror of the suggestion that, unbeknown to them, they could be intimately linked to or, even be, a black person. As being a black person means the sudden downsizing to inferior social status and all its accompanying disadvantages, it becomes imperative that racial boundaries are maintained. The reported 'dumping' of the 'dusky' girlfriend of the English footballer, Lee Bowyer, because he discovered

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<sup>43</sup> Channel 4, aired October 1999.

her mother was half-Indian and could not ‘risk a brown baby’<sup>44</sup> illustrates the continued pervasiveness of the racial dynamics that have work to constitute the pathological framework of the ‘first wave’ of conceptualising mixedness.

What is now becoming clear regarding UK and US mixed race projects is that, organising the marginality and impurity of the discursive practice of mixed race is the idea of white identity and its associated privileges. The following section will attempt to demonstrate how the representation and perception of mixed race in the UK and USA is the result of the transgression of norms of sexuality as defined by the concept of white family identity.

### **The Hegemony of White Family Identity**

As Sollors points out, the motif of ‘atavism’ has remained what he calls an enduring theme of interracialism (Sollors, 1997). The idea of bearing a child that is unexpectedly different in its race from its mother continues to be of general interest<sup>45</sup> as indeed, as has been illustrated, does the idea of knowingly producing ‘racially different’ children. Whilst popular expression of this interest might take different forms to the overt shock and outrage of earlier times, it is argued in this final section of the chapter that contemporary reaction to the production and status of racially mixed offspring is still predicated upon the transgression of hegemonic white family boundary lines which are inextricably linked to norms and controls of sexuality, particularly those of women.

#### *Miscegenation and Sexuality*

The role of sex and sexuality is paramount to an understanding of interracialism. In addition to the other aspects of mixed race representation mentioned previously should be noted a high degree of accompanying sexual objectification. The tragic mulatto of Abolitionist and indeed black authored fiction was usually incredibly beautiful or handsome – even the anti-mulatto fiction of the Reconstruction era featured beautiful, though dangerous, mixed

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<sup>44</sup> *The People*, 16 December 2001.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the media frenzy surrounding the IVF mix-up that led to mixed race twins being born to a white couple in March 2003 as well as the earlier example of Bowyer’s fear of a ‘throwback’ baby. *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* 27 March 2003.



race characters, as does the ‘half-caste’ literature of Imperial Britain. This stock portrayal of racially mixed people as beautiful but doomed or beautiful but deadly again emerges from the underlying articulations of vigorous and degenerative impurity as discussed earlier, where the crossing of the races can result in the physical best of both worlds yet the moral or emotional worst.

This sexual ambivalence towards the mixed race figure in popular thought is, of course, inextricably linked to wider notions of sexualisation of the parent races – the ways in which white men have traditionally sexualised themselves, white women and the racialised ‘other’ have had a vital role in the production of those social relations which produce constructions of mixedness. White western heterosexuality has emerged around a normative model in which a dominant white male sexuality posits ‘the female other’ as sexually voracious and therefore available, if not always or necessarily desirable, whilst positing white females as desirable, yet not sexually aware or available. With the sexuality of ‘the male other’ being conceptualised as both dangerous and/or undesirable, interracialism – both in terms of relationships and offspring – challenges fundamental ideas of what is ‘normal’ sexual behaviour (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Olumide, 2002; Kouri, 2003). Indeed one of the reasons that the tragic octoroon had such interest and resonance for audiences was due to the titillating aspect of her being white in appearance, thus untouchable, yet black in heritage, thus available (Sollors, 1997). However, there is only an element of titillation when the appetites of white male sexuality are being aroused; indeed, the still common verbal ‘lynchings’ directed at many white women with racially different partners of being sexually ‘loose’ reveal the anger provoked by this perceived deviant behaviour and the failure of white women to uphold the norms of white heterosexuality (Olumide, 2002).<sup>46</sup> Whilst it is not difficult to see that it the

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<sup>46</sup> Whilst a detailed understanding of the processes which lead ‘the normalised’ and ‘the other’ to transgress these norms can provide further insight into the ways in which mixedness is constructed, as stated in chapter 1, it is felt that an in-depth analysis of *racial mixing* would detract from the analysis of the *racially mixed*, which is the focal point of the thesis. In terms of such future work however, it would be illuminating from a historical perspective to know more regarding the real extent of acceptance of the relationships between white women and black men in 18<sup>th</sup> century England as well as the attitudes – both contemporary and historical – of ‘the other’ towards racial mixing. For details of work conducted in this area, see Fryer, 1984; Walvin, 1973; Mencke, 1978; Lorimer, Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Modood et al. 1997; Olumide, 2002; Kouri,

transgression of these sexual norms which continues to cause outrage, less noticeable perhaps, is the accompanying transgression of familial identity norms which is central to an understanding of the 'first wave' conceptualisation of mixed race as a whole.

### *Miscegenation and Transgression*

The ongoing significance of racialised identities in the United States has been one of the main areas of enquiry of the American philosopher Naomi Zack. In her analysis of why race remains such a powerful organisational structure, she differentiates between what she calls the 'scientific concept of race' and the 'ordinary concept of race'. For Zack, the scientific concept of race, which explains race as the inheritance of physical characteristics of populations does not support the ordinary concept of race (Zack, 1993). This latter concept states that physical characteristics of individuals are not only inherited from their forebears but inhere in individuals in some physical way, that is, that racial categories are primarily cultural categories, passing on racial characteristics as traits, these traits being present in every individual member of that race. If the ordinary concept of race is not supported then by the scientific concept of race, why, asks Zack, is the concept still retained beyond the power of logical argument? What purpose does it serve? The answer, she argues, is that 'the ordinary concept of physical race is a matter not merely of individual identity and privilege but of identity and privilege *for-the-sake-of* white family identity and privilege' (Zack, 1993, p30). Traditionally, states Zack, white designated families have had greater political, economic and social advantages than families of any other designation in the Anglo-American world. Such privileges are the cornerstone of the institution of the Western slave trade, which was built on a strong white supremacist ideology (Rockquemore, 2002). In order then to gain access to these privileges, the overriding requirement was the possession of white identity – to be racially designated as black meant that such access was denied. However, in order for people to be designated white, they had to belong to white

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2003). Also the Channel 4 programmes *Interracial Love*, and *White Girls Are Easy*, aired autumn 2003.



families, which were constructed as white only if black people had been, were and continued to be excluded from them (Zack, 1993). The disruption of this organisation that the act of miscegenation threatened led to the emergence and function of the one-drop rule as an uncoded societal norm – if all products of interracial unions were considered ‘non-white’, the ideological logic, and privileges, of the slave system could continue unthreatened (Rockquemore, 2002). Moreover, the adoption of the one-drop rule meant that the sexual privileges of white men with black slave women could also continue unabated – although it would have been easier to maintain white family identity by not racially mixing in the first place, the slave-owning mentality included a belief that white male slave owners had a right to use their black female slaves sexually. Sexual relations between white women and black men were, however, strictly forbidden (Rockquemore, 2003). If Zack’s theory is accepted, the sexualisation of white womanhood that placed a premium on defending its purity was actually about the protection of white family identity – to have a mulatto child of a white woman in the family unit threatened both the purity of the individual family and the ideological logic of the slave system as a whole. To have a mulatto child of a white man in the slave quarters, however, was not only tolerated, but considered an economic asset, thanks to the rationalisation of the one-drop rule (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Whilst Zack’s reliance on the American slavery system leaves little room for those factors of class that, as touched upon earlier, may illuminate the dynamics of the historical context in Britain,<sup>47</sup> her general proposal of the protection of white family identity in the Anglo-American world as a key organisational structure in the perception and construction of mixed race is an appropriate one. Indeed, re-reading the seventeenth century invective of Edward Long cited earlier, we see the same fears of contamination of white family and social identity that are repeated in the panicked appeals of white supremacists to ‘Keep Britain (or America) White’. Indeed the motivation behind the late eighteenth

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<sup>47</sup> More information on the real extent of attitudes towards the racial mixing of black men and white women in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, however, needs to be known before we can draw a more authoritative race/class model around the conceptualisation of mixedness during these times.

century resettlement scheme for the Black British poor to Sierra Leone to prevent, as one of the project's pioneers put it 'unnatural connections between black persons and whites; the disagreeable consequences of which make their appearance but too frequently in our streets'. (Fryer, 1984: p196) would not be out of place on contemporary far-right websites. However, such concerns are not merely those of racial extremists. If whiteness is the badge that allows membership into club of privileges, then it is imperative that, consciously or not, whiteness is upheld. As Zack points out, 'many unintentionally racist white people who might support the aspirations of designated black people and egalitarian social change are intentional racists when it comes to their families' (Zack, 1993, p31). In this respect, the concerns that are reported in many mixed race biographies regarding the position of the children of interracial unions by white relatives can be read as fear for the loss of privileges for the children and, consequently, for themselves. As one of Olumide's mixed race respondents recalled of his white family:

*My mother would experience racism, and I, by association [...] I know my mother would be told by some members of the family, 'Don't bring him round here, you're a shame on the family.'*<sup>48</sup>

The long-standing perception of mixed race people in the UK and USA as inhabiting a problematic state can thus be seen as emerging in large part through the hegemony of white family identity. However, it should be noted other socio-historical locales which have conceptualised mixed race in a similar fashion will quite possibly also be structured in a way which posits a particular racial or ethnic family identity as the hegemonic order to be protected and maintained. In Japan, for example, the existence of *konketsuji*, racially mixed people, challenges the hegemonic notion of 'Japaneseness' in a highly comparable manner, except that here 'whiteness' is not the ruling discourse but rather, like 'blackness' in the Anglo-American world – and again in Japan – is seen as a challenge to a

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<sup>48</sup> Olumide (2002) p120.



conception of a racialised purity (Burkhardt, 1983; Yamashita, 1996; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001).

In its attempt to synthesise some of the most significant interactions between those racial dynamics which have been key in producing the most dominant conceptualisations of mixed race in the UK and USA – which, in this thesis, is dubbed the ‘first wave’ – this chapter has covered a vast temporal and geographical terrain. As such, let us recap the key arguments and findings so far. There are four main points it is worth reminding ourselves of at this stage. The first is that the analytical tools provided by Omi and Winant’s concept of racial formation theory – in its racialised formation sense – are extremely useful for allowing us to begin to understand the ways in which mixedness is represented discursively and organised structurally in the two countries at both the personal and wider socio-political level. As such, the second point is that the racial dynamics that operate within and between these discursive and organisational terrains can be usually summarised under the themes of the representation of marginality, the articulation of purity and impurity and the hegemony of white family privilege. The dynamics that can be found within such themes can be considered the ‘first wave’ of understanding mixedness, in that they have been the dominant framework within which popular and social scientific understandings of mixedness have largely operated. The third point is that due to the racial formation processes from which the racial dynamics of this ‘first wave’ of understanding mixedness have sprung, mixed race projects in the UK and USA have primarily been concerned with the question of ‘black and white’ mixedness. However, as the fourth and final point argues, the ways in which these conceptions of blackness and whiteness have themselves been formed does not only depend on temporal aspects of the racial formation process but also on its geographical context. As such, conceptions of mixedness can be seen as operating differently at various times in the UK and USA due to the negotiation and transformation of different racialised categories. Thus, the presence of the Eurasian in debates on mixedness in both locales became less prominent as the concept of ‘East Asianness’ gained a ‘higher status’ in the racialisation process

(Williams-Leon & Nakashima. 2001). Furthermore, despite the overall similarities in the 'low status' bequeathed on blackness in both countries, there are critical differences in the ways in which the conceptualisations of blackness have played out in the two countries – in terms of conceptualisations of class and gender, the settlement of black populations, and attitudes towards mixing in general. In this respect, the question of whether the wholesale, rather than partial, adoption of many of the American theoretical frameworks is the best way to understand mixedness in the UK – both historically and currently – raises its head.

Certainly, this is a question which we shall return to as the thesis continues its course of analysis. Before then, the following chapter continues to engage with the dominant framework of the 'first wave' by asking to what extent the racial dynamics of the ' ' are being challenged in contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness. In a world where taken for granted notions of identity are constantly being interrogated and challenged, is there a counter discourse to the representations and articulations of marginality and impurity that have dominated perceptions of mixed race for so long? What is the shape of the mixed race projects of the UK and USA in the era of identity politics?



## Chapter 3:

### Mixed Race Projects: 'The New Wave'

*Growing up, I came up with this name: I'm a 'Cablinasian'. As in Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian.*

Tiger Woods, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, 24 April 1997

#### Introduction

In some ways it seems that Tiger Woods was the catalyst. When the American golfer famously 'came out' as being multiracial on *Oprah*, mixed race identity suddenly found itself a focal point of the media agenda on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>49</sup> Overriding those irritated *Oprah* audience voices and their supporters, such as Colin Powell, who tried to shush or shame Woods back to 'blackness', the heavyweight media took up the case, and heralded the presence of the 'beige' race.<sup>50</sup> Even so, it appeared that the media had been caught sleeping – their intermittent articles on interracial relationships over the past decade didn't seem to have quite captured the extent to which, by all new accounts, racial boundaries were rampantly being crossed to produce an abundance of coffee coloured children.

Yet, while Tiger Woods may have inadvertently triggered the public's interest in mixed race, as mentioned previously a growing body of work had been steadily forming on the subject for some time. Spearheaded by Root (1992) and Zack (1993) in the USA and Wilson (1987) and Tizard & Phoenix (1993) in the UK, the early 1990s saw the emergence of an influential transatlantic network of scholars interested in bringing mixedness back onto the late twentieth century agenda, but this time challenging the traditional conceptualisations of the 'first wave'. Co-existing, and sometimes, crossing with this academic network are

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<sup>49</sup> In answer to the question of whether he viewed himself as an African-American, Woods said that he identified himself as 'Cablinasian', his tailor-made racial term to acknowledge all sides of his racial heritage. Interestingly, the media coverage over Woods's racial self-definition has been infinitely greater than that over earlier racist remarks directed at Woods by Fuzzy Zoeller, another professional American golfer.

<sup>50</sup> *Time* 5 May 1997; *Newsweek*, 5 May 97; *Guardian*, 22 May 1997

groups of which have been labelled 'multiracial activists', that is, local and national organisations that serve as support groups or political interest groups for mixed race people, particularly in terms of the right to an 'accurate' racial identity on official monitoring forms such as the Census (Tessman, 1999: p276). Among the most prominent in the USA are currently the Association of Multi-ethnic Americans (AMEA), Project Reclassify All Children Equally (Project RACE), I-Pride, the Biracial Family Network (BFN), Hapa Issues Forum (HIF), the Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) and Swirl, whilst in the UK, the main groups are People in Harmony (PIH), Mosaic and Intermix. As the production of academic books and articles as well as biographies, novels, websites, weblogs, newsletters, conferences and other forms of dissemination around 'positive' conceptualisations of mixedness boom in the twenty-first century, it seems fair to conclude that we are in the midst of a 'new wave' of conceptualising mixedness. Positioning the mixed race voice at the centre of empirical investigations into mixed race, this new wave works to reject the impressionistic observation and popular myths (Wilson, 1987; p16) that fuelled the 'first wave' orthodoxy of marginalisation and pathologisation through which mixed race was previously comprehended, and embraces instead the positive potential of the 'third space' of hybridisation and creolisation (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1996) through which the mixed race voice suggests it can be better understood.

As shall be demonstrated more clearly in the following chapters, the dynamics of this new wave are having a significant impact not only on the way that mixed race is engaged with amongst mixed race people, particularly those within the more 'elite' confines of the academic and activist network, but on the ways in which it is being perceived outside the network. At both the level of the individual and at a wider social level, mixedness is being recognised and conceptualised as a distinct phenomenon (whether, as shall be discussed, in the positive sense promulgated by elements of the 'new wave' or more negative reactions against it). In some respects, it would appear that the success of the new wave – and multiracial activists in particular – in raising and challenging the profile of mixedness within the racial formation processes of the UK and the



USA is due to its largely cohesive framework. Indeed, despite the wide thematic focus of the discourse produced by the network (in terms of both identities and practical concerns, such as adoption, education, Census recognition. etc.), the extent of disagreement within it has been less disparate than might be expected. However, if we view what Omi and Winant (1994) call the ‘racial trajectory’ of the ‘new wave’ – that is, the development of discourse around shared values and demands of the group – as occupying a ‘united phase of conflict’ – in terms of its seeking to change the dominant racial ideology through intellectual projects – the level of accord within the ‘new wave’ is quite understandable. With the mixed race voice having long been ignored in favour of popular perceptions that cast mixedness as an undesirable state according to the hegemony of white family privilege as demonstrated in chapter 2, the primary goal of those branded such has been to remove the stigma and de-pathologise their racialised state. Whatever the particular discursive focus or terrain of the ‘new wave’ – education, adoption, Census recognition – the critique of the traditional literature is a constant theme and unitary factor.

Under the barrage of attack by the ‘new wave’, the structure of the ‘first wave’ is taking some clear and significant damage. Despite, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the continued evidence of conceptualising mixed race people according to the marginal, confused and other elements of its pathological framework, positive and ‘normative’ counter-presentations of mixedness are beginning to make themselves apparent within popular settings in the UK and the USA. The recent television adverts for Nike that featured flashing faces of young people of varied racial appearance, each of them saying ‘I am Tiger Woods’, are symptomatic of the wider representation of the mixed race in media images in the UK and USA in general (Nakashima, 2001; Streeter 2003). Moreover, UK soaps and dramas are increasingly featuring mixed race characters – played by mixed race actors – who are not only seen in interracial family settings and/or who are not only played by mixed race actors but whose issues and dramas are not necessarily related to their mixedness.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Angela Griffin in *Coronation Street*, *Holby City*, *Down To Earth*, Devon Anderson as ‘Billy Jackson’ in *Eastenders*, Ryan Thomas as ‘Jason Grimshaw’ in *Coronation Street*.

Whilst, as shall be discussed in chapter 7, the increased visibility of mixedness in the media, particularly in fashion and advertising, should not be uncritically celebrated (Streeter, 2003), it is clear that some of the explicitly pathological dynamics that marked the ‘first wave’ of representation are being challenged, in large part due to the efforts of the ‘new wave’.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, within academic circles, it is not just increasingly unusual to come across research that is clearly located within the pathological ‘first wave’ framework – the recent study on the health and behaviour risks of mixed race adolescents (Udry et al., 2003) cited in the previous chapter is a clear exception – but such research is largely carried out by those who are themselves mixed or mixing race.

Yet, whilst it is true that the ‘new wave’ challenges the traditional perspective on mixed race, to what *extent* does it do so? Although the reworking of mixed race as a positive rather than negative state seems on the surface an undoubted inversion of the status quo, how far does this position radically interrogate what it means to be mixed race? With the focus of the ‘new wave’ remaining, as with the traditional literature, largely on the individual, is it not more a question of viewing mixed race from the opposite side of the glass rather than repositioning the glass itself? Although the ‘myth’ of the unhappy ‘divided inheritance’ mixed race person is being replaced by the ‘voice’ of the positive ‘shared inheritance’ mixed race person, is there not a sense in which mixed race people are continuing to be located according to the pure/impure, superior/inferior polarised framework described in chapter 2?

In raising such questions, it should be made clear that the point is not to denigrate the aims or achievements of the ‘new wave’ but rather to locate them within the larger framework of UK and US mixed race projects. Returning to the broader theoretical framework of racial formation theory, and its idea of forms of resistance to and negotiation with and acceptance of the ruling order, both the necessity and inevitability of the ‘new wave’ become clear. As we look at the

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, prominent multiracial activists have created a ‘Mixed Media Watch’ to ‘track representations of mixed people in the media.’

<[www.xanga.com/home.aspx?user=mixedmediawatch](http://www.xanga.com/home.aspx?user=mixedmediawatch)>



articulation of the ‘new wave’ in this chapter. it will be argued that, in resisting and negotiating traditional conceptualisations of mixed race, the ‘new wave’ has nevertheless been forced to inhabit them. Moreover, it will also be argued that, with parts of ‘new wave’ thinking being absorbed into the State in terms of negotiation around the official recognition of mixedness, the beginnings of the breakdown of the united phase of conflict and the subsequent splintering or radicalisation of thought that accompany this (Omi and Winant, 1994) can be observed. With a small but increasingly significant number of ‘new wave’ scholars such as Mark Christian (2000) and Stephen Small (2001) questioning both the forms of resistance and the focus of the ‘new wave’ itself, it is argued in this chapter that this ‘new wave’ is fragmenting and that there are actually ‘three waves’ of mixed race thought in UK and US mixed race projects – the ‘first wave’ of traditional pathologisation of mixed race, the ‘second wave’ of resistance through reproduction of the focus of the ‘first wave’ (incorporating the Multiracial Movement) – and the ‘third wave’ which shares the desire to reposition mixedness with the ‘second wave’ but is critical of both the form, content and goals of this ‘second wave’ as it is of the ‘first wave’. The aim of this chapter is to explore the articulation of the discourse of the ‘new wave’ which is largely produced by an educated and middle-class elite and is conducted in an organised discursive arena of books, journals, newspaper articles, conferences and similar ‘textual practices’. The chapter explores the place of this ‘new wave’ in mixed race projects through outlining the main tenets of the ‘second wave’, which include those of the Multiracial Movement, as well as the emergence and form of the ‘third wave’.

### **New Wave: The ‘Second Wave’ and The Multiracial Movement**

Although others had previously commented on the late twentieth century attitudinal transition in researching and conceptualising mixed race (Root, 1992; Zack, 1993) Stephen Small was one of the first to see this shift in terms of a ‘movement’ as well as to interrogate it critically.<sup>53</sup> Small originally defined the

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<sup>53</sup> Whilst Nakashima (1996) refers to a mixed race ‘movement’, she does not critique it in the same way as Christian (2000) or Small (2001). Whilst Tessman (1999) also identifies and

Multiracial Movement as an American one, seeing it emerging from the fight by people in the USA who are mixing or of mixed race to gain 'inclusion of people of mixed heritage in all government agencies, especially the [U.S. 2000] census, so that a far more nuanced appreciation of racialised diversity can be acknowledged, and the implications of such nuances for the health and welfare of [mixed race] people can be addressed' (Small, 2001, p124). Others have also considered the activity and debates by certain individuals and groups who are mixing or of mixed race as a 'social movement' whether in terms of campaigning for Census recognition, organising social and support groups, or producing mixed race university courses, research projects and academic or activist papers and reports (Tessman, 1999; Streeter, 2003).

In terms of how this social movement is conceptualised in this work, it is argued that it is useful to view these activities and debates as two separate but interlinked (and often overlapping) 'movements' – the conceptualisations of mixedness as produced by academics (who may or may not be activists) and the articulation of many of these conceptualisations in the public arena by activists (who may be, but are not typically, academics). As this 'second wave' of conceptualising mixed race is drawn on by activists to shape the form and demands of the Multiracial Movement, reactions to which then provoke new conceptual concerns, it is clear that there is a symbiotic relationship between these two elements of the 'new wave', which might best be described as 'the mixed race network'.

Whilst this network can be considered as primarily emerging from the USA, it can nevertheless be considered to operate in a transatlantic context, in terms of the dialogue on mixedness that is taking place between the USA and the UK. Whilst, the level of 'multiracial activism' is significantly lower in the UK and the 'borrowing' of concepts and organisational frameworks from the USA to the UK is much higher – an issue that shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7 – what Small calls the same articulations of 'American principles of individualism', expressed primarily through the concepts of free choice and right

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critiques a 'mixed race movement' and can certainly be considered part of the 'third wave', she does not emphasise the need for a new integrated micro/macro approach as much as the others.



to representation, are evident in both contexts (Small, 2001: p125). The mission statements of the largest mixed race organisation groups in both the UK and USA – People in Harmony (PIH) and The Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) – both stress the right of individuals to define or assert their racial and cultural ancestry.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout both the academic and activist literature of the ‘second wave’, the sense of anger, frustration and defiance over the right to self-identify racially is omnipresent. However, whilst there is clearly a sense of discursive unity within the ‘second wave’, it is important to note that the discourse is not necessarily uniform. A closer look at the cohesive framework of the ‘second wave’ reveals several ideological strands of thought interwoven around the idea of ‘rights’. As Nakashima (1996) points out, these strands are not so much divisions but dimensions within the experience of ‘multiraciality’ as highlighted by the ‘second wave’ To this end, she identifies three approaches or ‘dominant voices’ within the ‘second wave’: the struggle for legitimacy of mixed race identity, the connection of mixed race voices, and the transcendence of (mixed) racial identity (Nakashima, 1996; p82). This three-point model provides an insightful means by which to comprehend the ideology of the ‘second wave’ – by modifying it only slightly, to locate the strands themselves in terms of their phase or stage of occurrence, a solid grasp of the dimensions of the ‘second wave’ is possible:

<b><u>Phase/state</u></b>	<b><u>Struggle for</u></b>
<i>Actual</i>	legitimacy of mixed race identities
<i>Potential</i>	connection of all mixed race identities
<i>Ideal</i>	transcendence of all racial identities

Looking at the parameters of the ‘second wave’ in more detail, the first struggle, where the focus is on belonging, inclusion and acceptance, is located in an ‘actual’ phase, in the sense that the development and consequent acknowledgment of a mixed race identity is essential for the here and now – whether it be in official (Census forms, Ethnic Monitoring forms) or unofficial

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<sup>54</sup> See<[www.pih.org.uk](http://www.pih.org.uk)>; <[www.ameasite.org](http://www.ameasite.org)>.

(social interaction) terms of recognition. In the ‘actual’ phase, actions work hand in hand with ideas and the presence of the Multiracial Movement is clear. Lobbying, debate, and change are all in evidence, compared with the development of a global connection of mixedness, what Ifekwunigwe (1998) has called ‘métisse’ identity, where the *experience* of being mixed race, rather than the racial mix, itself is what is important. This struggle is in what could be called a ‘potential’ phase, in the sense that it exists more as dialogue than in practice – whilst terms such as mixed race and multiracial, for example, are not necessarily tied to describing a specific mixed group, it appears that they still conjure up ideas of certain mixes over others (Wilson, 1992). Finally, the possibility of racial transcendence – where the mixed race terminology becomes redundant due to the myths of pure racial terms having been popularly debunked and rejected as identification markers – is frequently evoked in the literature but remains, obviously, in an ‘ideal’ stage of achievement.

With the ideological framework of the ‘second wave’ sketched out, our next focus is on the strands themselves, discussing in further detail how each dimension is articulated.

### **Legitimacy of Mixed Race Identity**

In her analysis of the ideology of the ‘second wave’, Nakashima views the dimension of legitimacy in terms of the struggle reported by many mixed race people to have *all* their ethnic or racial heritages recognised, or to have a specific racial or ethnic community recognise them as a full member without erasing their mixedness. Legitimacy for Nakashima is primarily seen as a question of the authenticity of mixedness in ‘monoracial’ communities, that is the ability to ‘fit in’, whether this be in terms of physical appearance, relationships or cultural and political knowledge and attachment (Nakashima, 1996). Whilst Nakashima’s interpretation does indeed pinpoint a constant ‘motif’ of the literature, there are several others that might also be considered as staple elements of the theme of legitimacy. Thus, in this analysis, it is argued that the struggle for legitimacy takes place on several levels: anti-pathologisation, recognition and acceptance.



### *Anti-pathologisation*

As illustrated in the previous chapter, traditional research into mixed race has posited it as inherently problematic – the replacement of biological conceptions of mixed race in the early twentieth century by social conceptions were, if less virulently hostile towards the idea, still of the same opinion: it was neither a wise nor desirable state of affairs. Such opinion was the inevitable result of a social scientific paradigm that automatically assumed mixed race to be a problem identity – the ‘clinical’ examples being studied by Stonequist et al. during the majority of the twentieth century automatically powered the problem-problem confirmation-problem cycle, resulting in the oppressive ‘pathologisation’ of mixedness as described in chapter 2. However, as also stated earlier, the leviathans of marginality and mental turmoil around which this pathological framework was constructed have come under a sustained attack by the ‘new wave’ of mixed race research. The desire to reposition mixed race from a pathological framework to a normative one is particularly prominent in the agenda of the ‘second wave’. Indeed, anti-pathologisation of the mixed race experience and condition is arguably at the core of the ‘second wave’. In one of the most influential texts of the ‘second wave’, Maria Root argues that the ‘oppressive squeeze created by the mechanics of racism [that] has historically relegated multiracial people to deviant status or “mistakes”’ must be resisted by ‘refusing to fragment, marginalize, or disconnect ourselves from people and from ourselves’ (Root, 1996; pp5-6). The need for resistance to the pathological framework of the ‘first wave’ runs clearly throughout the ‘second wave’ literature. To this end, what can be seen emerging from the ‘second wave’ literature is the unquestionable rejection of the negativity of the ‘between two cultures’ problem approach in favour of the creativity and liberation of what Thornton has labelled the ‘variant approach’, where ‘simultaneous membership and multiple fluid identities [are] common’ (Thornton, 1996: p108). What this means is that, far from being conceptualised in a way which defines it as an inherently problematic state, mixed race is being redefined by the ‘second wave’ as a ‘stable’ social category (Phoenix and Owen, 1996). The torn and divided ‘in-

between', 'neither-nor' state of mixedness which once defined the research field is crumpling as more and more people of mixed backgrounds bring their own experiences and voices to academic analyses of mixedness. Unable or refusing to identify the pathological state as descriptive of their own sense of self, people of mixed race are demanding that the field is reshaped in order to recognise that many mixed race people are able to negotiate their identities in different contexts and at different times, thus leading to a stable conception of their mixedness (Parker and Song, 2001).

Within the discursive space that the 'second wave' has carved out for the projection of the mixed race voice as anti-pathological, the notion of stability is an important one as far as the drive for legitimacy of mixed racialised identities is concerned. If mixed race is not an 'unstable' category, but valid in its own right, there is then no need for it to be subsumed by or understood through traditionally stable 'monoracial' categories. The anti-pathological framework, which locked people of mixed backgrounds in a vulnerable, confused marginal place from which only the law of hypodescent could free them, is destroyed by the notion of stability and, consequently, legitimacy of the mixed race category. However, although the vast body of mixed race biography indicates that many people of mixed backgrounds see their mixedness as legitimate, it is often quite a different picture when it comes to having it recognised by others.

### *Recognition*

Whilst race, is one of the primary social identifiers used in the UK and USA to provide clues about who someone is, as Omi and Winant point out, the interpretations of these clues rely on our preconceived notions of a racialised social structure. In this respect, someone who cannot be conveniently categorised can provoke a 'crisis of racial meaning' (Omi and Winant: 1994, p59) which can lead to a rethinking and shift in assumptions and understandings (Williams, 1996) or, more commonly, a correction of racial categorisation (Omi and Winant, 1994). The 'second wave' – and the Multiracial Movement in particular – can very clearly be seen to have materialised partly as a result of wanting to have the racial social identifiers of those of mixed race recognised on self-defined terms



rather than according to any preordained racialised categories. As Mahtani states, the identification of mixedness as a racial identity emerged to some extent as a way of deflecting the ‘constant interrogations’ of the ‘what are you...really?’ variety towards ‘the discovery of an identification that more aptly locates the ‘mixed race’ person outside of stifling racial categories’ (Mahtani, 2002: p472). As the tripartite model of the ‘second wave’ outlined earlier demonstrates, it is this drive towards having mixedness recognised as legitimate that drives the actions of the Multiracial Movement. Though, as shall be discussed subsequently, the transcendence of race-based identification is a key issue of the ‘second wave’, its ‘actual’ concern is prompted by the acknowledging the current social need to be ‘raced’ (Weisman, 1996) and, consequently, controlling the direction of racialisation. In this context, did Root compose the following, what might be considered the founding statement of the ‘second wave’ and the ‘constitution’ of the Multiracial Movement:

### ***BILL OF RIGHTS FOR RACIALLY MIXED PEOPLE***

*I have the right*

*Not to justify my existence in this world  
Not to keep the races separate within me  
Not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with my physical ambiguity  
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy*

*I have the right*

*To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify  
To identify myself differently than how my parents identify me  
To identify myself differently than my brothers or sisters  
To identify myself differently in different situations*

*I have the right*

*To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial  
To change my identity over my lifetime – and more than once  
To have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people  
To freely choose whom I befriend and love*

(Root, 1996; p.7)

Root’s Bill of Rights highlights both the ways in which many mixed race people feel the need to have their racial identity recognised as they decide and the extent to which their choices are questioned. Indeed, within literature of the ‘second

wave', the questioning and challenging of proffered racial identities is a frequent theme, as demonstrated by one of King and DaCosta's interviewees:

*I am applying to law school and I checked "other" and I walked my application over...and handed it in and the guy at the desk asks, "Why'd you check other?" and I said, "Well, you know I am not this and I am not that." He said, "it's not going to help you any and they are just going to lump you into this big mass." So...I just put Japanese and a little asterisk and put hapa.*

(King & DaCosta, 1996; p233)

The interviewee's negotiation between expressing his identity according to existing categories, having his decision challenged by the claim of illegitimacy of choice and deciding to assert his own 'true self identity' (King and DaCosta, 1996; p233) illustrates to some extent the dialogue of recognition and legitimacy which dominates the actual phase of the 'second wave'. As will be discussed further in chapter 4, the informal recognition of mixedness that many voices in the 'second wave' demand has increasingly been accompanied by calls for official recognition in all forms of state issued racial and ethnic categorisation. Yet, as the exchange above demonstrates, recognition of racial categories does not necessarily entail acceptance of them.

### *Acceptance*

*I say that I am "mixed-race" but if my dad heard me, he would box me round the head; he likes me to say I am black.*

(Interview with a ten year old boy, in Alibhai-Brown, 2001; p49)

*I will not have you using terms like "mixed-race". In this [social work] department the children are black if they are not white. That is all there is to say about this identity. If a white child says he is not white, would you correct him? So if a half-African child says he is not black, I just correct him.*

(Interview with a British social worker, in Alibhai-Brown, 2001; p49)

Whilst many mixed race individuals construct and accept an internalised mixed race identity (Katz, 1996), as Tiger Woods found out, it is often difficult to have self-abscribed mixed identities accepted in societies predicated on the notion of hypodescent. As shall be debated in chapters 6 and 7, with the articulation of hypodescent appearing to have shifted primarily to minority groups, whether in



terms of preserving ethnic group identity, or maintaining and managing quotas and economic resources, there is still an immense social pressure, to uphold the premise that one-drop of non-white blood makes a person non-white.<sup>55</sup> The nature of the hypodescent notion thus raises the question of acceptance for mixed race individuals, not only in terms of recognition ('mixed' as a legitimate category) but also in terms of allegiance. Indeed, as much of the 'second wave' literature shows, the act of demanding recognition and legitimacy for mixedness is made more complicated due to the need to prove that 'one's multiraciality does not preclude racial/ethnic authenticity' (Nakashima, 1996; p83). In an either/or world, claiming a mixed race identity is open to accusations of disloyalty, of trying to escape 'otherness', and, as such, raises the maligned spectre of 'passing' as outlined earlier in chapter 2.

Although the 'second wave' is primarily focused on the legitimacy of mixedness, there is some attempt within the literature to address these concerns and stress that claiming a multiracial identity doesn't have to mean rejection of any or all of the monoracial identities (Shrage, 1995). However, with some evident scepticism from critics outside the network regarding the proffered racial loyalties and allegiances of a 'separate, different but still inclusive' mixed racial identity (Jones, 1994; Spencer, 1997), it is not surprising that within the 'second wave' thoughts of a multiracial 'community' are appealing.

### **Connection of all Mixed Race Identities**

Whilst the 'second wave' literature has primarily been concerned with the black/white dichotomy that has long characterised the framework of mixedness, there is an increasing dimension within the 'second wave' that has worked to move beyond the 'biracial' focus of mixedness and reposition it as 'multiracial' or 'multiethnic'. At Cornell University in 2002, papers were given by a variety of speakers on American, Hapa, Brazilian, Japanese, and Latino multiraciality

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<sup>55</sup> Except perhaps in the Native American community, where blood quotas instigated to 'preserve' the purity of (and distribute resources to) Native Americans mean a complicated process of proving the lack of white other blood in your make-up. See Wilson (1992; Baird-Olson, 2003).

under the rubric 'The Mixed Race Experience'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the 'Rethinking Mixed Race' conference held in 1997 at the National Institute for Social Work, papers focused on different mixes of White European/Black Caribbean and Euro-Asians as well as mixedness occurring in Haiti and Singapore.<sup>57</sup>

With other ethnic and racial groups being included in the mix, there no doubt that 'multiraciality was and is moving from being an individual isolated experience to one that is increasingly collectively organized' (King, 1996; p228). Identifying this process as the habitation of a 'third space', Mengel attempts to move away from the 'duality of hybridity' which she sees as informing much of the 'second wave' conceptualisations of mixedness, in the sense that it posits the mixed race person in terms of being able to embrace, and be embraced, by his or her mixed heritages. Such a position does not highlight what she sees as the growing association of mixed race people on the basis of mixedness *per se*. As such, she argues that mixedness should be seen in terms of a 'triple' experience, rather than a dual one, for the 'third space' 'recognises mixedness as a panethnic link between people, which is different from linkages between mixed race people and monoracials who share a common ancestry.' Within this third space, she argues, oppressive 'twoness' can be shed in favour of 'wholeness' (Mengel, 2001; p111). Mengel's attempt to go beyond the 'actual' stage of legitimising mixed race identity to the next step – the 'potential' move towards a collective identity founded on the crossing of racial boundaries – is echoed in much of the literature, which frequently asks how and if mixed race people can negotiate the racial borders of the frontiers to constitute a separate global cultural or ethnic group (Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Root, 1996; Anzaldua, 1987). As Williams points out, many mixed race advocates who are attempting to make a claim for political recognition are 'searching for something, anything, to bind all biracials and multiracials together' (Williams, 1996; p204) in an attempt to avoid the constant referencing back to their parent's racial make-up. The opinions expressed by an Asian/European American biracial in an interview with Williams – 'I feel like I

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<sup>56</sup> 'The 6<sup>th</sup> Pan Collegiate on the Mixed Race Experience', held at Cornell University, USA, 20-22 April 2002.

<sup>57</sup> 'Rethinking Mixed Race Conference', National Institute for Social Work, 12 December 1997.



don't have my own racial identity. I have a racial identity through my parents.' (Williams, 1996; p206) – expresses a common mixed race identity frustration – though most people are, technically, racially defined *by* their parents, the mixed race individual is constantly defined *through* theirs. in the sense that the individual's offered or assumed racial identity will most likely be rechecked through soliciting that of the parents.

In this respect, a dimension of the 'second wave' sees the 'what are you...really?' encounters reported by many mixed race people as more than common incidents – they become concrete, identifiable experiences that bind together a great number of mixed race people together and fortify their sense of mixedness (Williams, 1996; p204). This sense of social and racial ambiguity, fluid identities amid rigid racial boundaries, and a grounding in duality and multiplicity, have been noted by many in the 'second wave' as defining mixedness and uniting the mixed experience (Root, 1992). Yet, interestingly, at the same time that the commonality of the mixed experience is promoted, there is often an accompanying sense of frustration, due to the pressures of negotiating the legitimacy of mixedness – whether as a group or individual experience – in response to the strictures of racialisation itself. It is thus not entirely surprising that the third prominent dimension of the Multiracial Movement is one which wishes to avoid the pressures of racial categorisation by transcending the racialisation process altogether.

### **Transcendence of Race**

*There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective. And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere illusion, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate.*  
(Omi and Winant, 1994; p54)

Whilst it might be said that the main purpose of the majority of those within the Multiracial Movement is to tackle restrictive racial categories at the 'actual' level (lobbying for change in Census and official monitoring forms, etc.), for some others, the ultimate aim is to shatter the concept of race entirely. The conception of the 'transcendence' of race and its attending classification of people on the

basis of their common humanity is an important one for some multiracial theorists. Most notably articulated by Zack, a distinct ‘anti-race’ ideology can be seen within the ‘second wave’ a concept she calls ‘deracination’, that is, a refusal to identify oneself or to identify others racially:

*The concept of race is an oppressive cultural invention and convention, and I refuse to have anything to do with it... Therefore I have no racial affiliation and will accept no racial designations. If more people joined me in refusing to play the unfair game of race, fewer injustices based on the concept of race would be perpetrated.*  
(Zack in Nakashima, 1996; p89)

This strand of what might be called ‘racial atheism’ can be found running throughout the terrain of the Movement in both its academic forms, as exemplified by Zack, as well as in forms of personal expression where the desire to be ‘just me, without race’ is frequently expressed.<sup>58</sup> However, the idea that ‘racelessness [is] the next freeing stage after microdiversity’ (Zack, 1995; p301) and speculation that the relationship between race and identity may not always exist (Alcoff, 1995; Perlmann, 2000), although frequently posited, are tempered by a grudging awareness that such propositions are likely to remain purely theoretical for some time. If recognising mixed race identity is the actual process of shattering the illusion of pure race, then the struggle for the transcendence of race within the literature takes place at the ‘ideal’ level. Indeed, it is clear that there is still an immense terrain to be covered before the struggles of mixedness in the actual and potential phase are satisfactorily managed and so the transcendence of race in relation to mixedness exists primarily as an emergent area of thought with, as chapter 7 shall discuss in further detail, little concrete theoretical development beyond a few authors. Overall, it is fair to say then that the legitimacy and connection of mixed race identities defines the ideological structure of the ‘second wave’.

As the next chapter will discuss further, with the UK and US Censuses now officially recognising the process of racial mixing, there is no doubt that the Multiracial Movement is having a significant effect on the ways in which mixed

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<sup>58</sup> See the ethnographic findings of chapter 5 for examples of this.



race in conceptualised in the UK and USA, particularly in terms of its legitimacy as a racial identity. However, the high speed of momentum with which the ideology of the ‘second wave’ has developed over the last decade means that there has been very little room for contemplation of the ways in which this ideology has taken shape. It is only recently, with the emergence of the ‘third wave’, that such reflection has taken place.

### **The New Wave: Critiques**

As illustrated earlier in this chapter, the ‘second wave’ emerged from a desire on the part of those mixing and of mixed race, to reposition their racialised identities from a pathological to a stable framework. Whilst, as we have seen and shall continue to demonstrate in later chapters, it is clear that great inroads into this re-conceptualisation process have taken place both in policy and representational terms, it is less clear to what extent the theoretical underpinnings of the pathological framework have really been challenged. This section examines the analytical tools used by the ‘second wave’ to support its ideology as well as the emergence of a ‘third wave’ approach to mixedness which questions and challenges both the tools and the ideology of the ‘second wave’ whilst clearly remaining part of the ‘new wave’.

#### *Pathological and Anti-Pathological Tools*

In its various struggles for legitimacy, connection of and even transcendence of mixed racial identities, there is no doubt that the ‘second wave’ presents a direct challenge to the ruling discourse of traditional UK and US mixed race projects. However, as the impact of its initial challenge eases and the ideology of the ‘second wave’ itself comes under the spotlight, certain theoretical issues are raised. Whilst many of these, as shall be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, are concerned with the political implications of racial organisation, there is also the question of the analytical tools that the ‘second wave’ employs in order to build its alternative discourse. In several respects, these seem to be somewhat problematic.

As chapters 6 and 7 shall illustrate further, the collective conception of mixed race identity which has been mooted as a potential 'goal' by the 'second wave' has come under some criticism from those outside the mixed race network. Concern that a collective mixed race identity would reinforce biological ideas of the superiority and inferiority of race and or reproduce a 'New Coloured People' (Spencer, 1997) is also echoed within certain areas of the discourse. Parker and Song (2001) have rightly expressed alarm that emphasis on demonstrating mixed race identity is stable, positive and creative leads at times to a discourse which can sometimes 'slip over into an uncomfortable notion of "heterosis"', i.e. biological superiority (Parker and Song, 2001; p9). This is often expressed in terms of asserting notions of superior physical attractiveness:

*You cannot take three steps in any of our large metropolitan areas without seeing a mixed-race couple, often with exquisitely beautiful children.*  
(Alibhai-Brown, 2001, p82)

Additionally, 'heterosis' can also be seen in a form of 'cultural superiority', with mixed race people heralded as the racial 'saviours of the nation' due to their superior cultural bridging abilities:

*Ideally, our community has the potential to become the stable core around which the ethnic pluralism of the United States can be united.*  
(Fernandez, 1995; p200)

Whilst the urge to compensate for a history of anti-miscegenation feeling by highlighting the positives regarding mixed race identity is understandable, the tendency to express this through a 'heterosistic' perspective not only leaves the mixed race arena open to suspicion, but unconsciously reproduces the pathological framework from which the 'second wave' asserts it is so keen to escape. Replacing arguments over the degenerative qualities of mixedness by those asserting the strength of hybrid vigour continues the pathological framework explored in chapter 2. Although the writers of the above statements forcefully reject the pathological framework of the 'first wave', their statements are similar to earlier pronouncements which celebrated the 'hybrid vigour'. In



1842, the hero of Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* dreamed of retreating to the 'Orient' where he would:

*...take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.  
Iron-jointed, supple-sinew'd, they shall dive, and they shall run,  
Catch the wild goat by the hair, and hurl their lances in the sun;  
Whistle back the parrot's call, and leap the rainbows of the brooks,  
Not with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books*  
Tennyson (1842)

Meanwhile, in 1859, Anthony Trollope imagined a 'new race' inhabiting the West Indies:

*...fitted by nature for their burning sun, in whose blood shall be mixed  
some portion of Northern energy, and which shall owe its physical  
prowess to African progenitors – a race that shall be no more ashamed  
of the name of Negro than we are of the name of Saxon?*  
(Cited in Rich, 1986; p52)

Whilst it might be tempting to see such imaginings as positive pronouncements of mixedness, as we have seen in chapter 2, the other side of celebrating 'hybrid vigour' is the condemnation of mulatto weakness. Continuing to utilise the ideological tools that conceptualise mixed race people as 'vigorous' may fulfil an immediate psychological need but lays the 'second wave' open to an accusatory backlash of a conceptualisation that views mixedness through a condemning degenerative frame.

#### *The 'Third Wave'*

It is thus becoming clear that, in the pressing need to put a stable and legitimate concept mixed race on the agenda, there has been little time to develop a set of analytical and conceptual tools with which to dismantle traditional discourse of mixedness and build a new framework. However, as the new wave leaves its infancy, it is also becoming clear that another dimension, separate from the 'second wave', is emerging, one which upholds many of the Multiracial Movement's principles whilst simultaneously critiquing its methods. This is the 'third wave'.

It should perhaps be reiterated that whilst there are certain key themes that can be said to constitute the discourse of what has been labelled the 'second wave', this is not to suggest that it is entirely homogeneous or united in its opinions and approaches. Indeed, many of those cited as exemplifying the voice of the different dimensions of 'second wave', such as Root and Zack, have themselves raised critical questions regarding certain aspects of the ideology and tools used by the 'second wave'. Much of the 'second wave' of mixed race research has followed this pattern, that is to say, it is aware of the complex and problematic nature of articulating and rewriting mixedness, yet bypasses some of the more demanding or controversial areas of enquiry in order to focus on the over-riding 'right' to recognition with which it is primarily concerned. It is only relatively recently that there has begun to emerge what might be called a 'third wave' of mixed race focused research, one which retains a commitment to an anti-pathological conceptualisation of mixedness, but which simultaneously shines the spotlight on some of the theoretical and ideological issues that 'second wave' would rather sidestep in favour of maintaining the 'actual' agenda of legitimacy, recognition and acceptance.

Although, as discussed previously, they are not the first to critique the 'new wave' from the inside, Stephen Small and Mark Christian might be considered the founders of the 'third wave'. Whilst others have also critically assessed aspects of the 'second wave' before, such as its lack of broader theoretical perspective (Olumide, 2002), its conception of 'community' (Williams, 1996; Spencer, 1999) and its embracing of 'racelessness' (Thornton, 1996) Small and Christian go further and make direct criticisms of the analytical tools and ideological framework of the 'second wave' itself.

The general focus of Small and Christian is similar in that they both believe mixedness can best be understood through 'an appreciation of the structural contexts, institutional patterns and ideological articulations that imbricate themselves in the racialised social formation of the contemporary USA [and UK]' (Small, 2001, p117). In this respect, they differ significantly from the majority of the 'second wave' literature which, although it might state something similar, often finds itself understanding mixedness through the articulation of



individualism mentioned earlier in the chapter. This impatience with the individualist approach to mixed race – what Donovan Chamberlayne has labelled ‘I amism’, the demand of social rights for the individual. (cited in Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Bradshaw, 1992) – is clear in both their works, although the specific focus is slightly different. For Small, it is the ‘second wave’s fixation on ‘personal choice’ to the exclusion of an understanding of wider social contexts which prevents a deeper comprehension of mixedness. He argues that the focus on psychological issues involved in identity formation and the indifference towards the social consequences of the demands (Small, 2001; p126) limit the insight into mixedness beyond a personal understanding. For Small, the importance of social relations are obscured by the second wave’s current perspective as well as the difference in conceptualisations of mixedness in other terrains. Small argues strongly that the analytical enterprise of understanding mixedness ‘must continue to focus on structural contexts, institutional patterns, and ideological articulations, as they are expressed in the light of local histories’ (Small, 2001; p129).

The need to move away from the individualist approach is also echoed by Christian. In no uncertain terms, he criticises what he calls the attempt to produce ‘an almost “arty”, avant-garde, “new people”’ by the likes of Root et al. and accuses a faction of the ‘second wave’ of naivety as it fails to take into account the importance of the historical terrain involving interracial relations (Christian, 2001; p5). Moreover, he states that the ‘second wave’ falls into the same trap of pathologising mixedness by working to create ‘a new literature’ that categorises mixed race persons basically as a ‘separate entity’ (Christian, 2001: p13). For Christian, multiracial identity must be approached not by celebrating hybridity *per se* but through a model which allows it to be understood as a social construct that has special social consequences for certain groups that are defined as such. Whilst the experiences of mixedness differ around the world, Christian argues that there is a common link in the way each group has interacted with the social forces of white supremacy. Using a number of international multiracial identities as an example, Christian’s approach, like Small’s, puts considerable emphasis on

a complex networked approach rather than the somewhat narrow individual focus that largely constitutes the focus of the ‘second wave’.

Whilst some of Christian’s criticisms are slightly unfair – within the Root et al body of work there are many important, ‘non-arty’, points regarding the conceptualisation of mixedness – in general, both his and Small’s critique of the Multiracial Movement and their suggestions regarding the way mixed race might better be understood are highly valid. There is quite clearly an overwhelming bias amongst the literature of the ‘second wave’ towards the psychological analysis of the individual experiences of mixed race peoples, most of whom appear to come from similar backgrounds. Largely, the mixed race experiences that are posited by the ‘second wave’ as representing the mixed race condition are those of female white/black, middle-class and college educated Americans, who are academics, activists or participants in research projects. This is not to say that such a focus invalidates the findings of the mixed race condition, rather that the mixed race condition may rather need to be seen as being defined by the experiences of this group of mixed race people. In some ways, the framing of the mixed race condition by the ‘second wave’ in terms of personal identity rights, rather than under the community or group rights that have characterised other racialised social movements can be seen as the privilege of a group that, as Small suggests, is largely unreflective about the class basis and social consequences of its demands (Small, 2001; p126). Within the ‘second wave’, the voice of mixed race people from working class and economically disadvantaged communities is distinctly lacking, begging the question of whether the inclusion of this voice would reframe the nature of the mixed race condition. Indeed, a project on the educational experiences of mixed race pupils in Britain, in which many participants came from working class communities, suggested that whilst participants had a distinct and positive sense of their mixedness, they were less concerned with their ‘right’ to identify and be acknowledged as mixed than those of the ‘second wave’ appear to be (Tikly, Caballero & Haynes, 2004). Whilst it is important not to generalise from one study, and considering that the British context of this project may be a significant factor here (indeed, this is something which shall be discussed further in later chapters), the findings of the British



report do raise questions about the discursive construction and organisational structure of the 'second wave' as a whole. Consequently, as Small and Christian both argue, an analytical approach that widens, or at least understands the importance of widening, the focus of mixed race studies is critical.

Whilst the infancy of the 'third wave' makes it difficult to assess authoritatively its impact on conceptualisations of mixedness to date, its existence nevertheless raises certain important challenges to the field as it stands now. Let us conclude this chapter by returning to this contemporary field and reflecting on some of the main points raised by the analysis of the 'new wave' conducted here.

In terms of reflecting on the dynamics of the 'new wave' in contemporary mixed race projects in the UK and USA, there are two key points that merit a brief review. The first is that there is a distinct 'new wave' of conceptualising mixedness emerging in the UK and USA which is challenging the pathological discursive representations of the 'first wave'. Operating largely in a 'united phase of conflict' against the ruling order, this 'new wave' is mostly defined by the dynamics of what has been dubbed here as the 'second wave', that is the production of 'insider-led' academic conceptualisations of and activist lobbying for recognition, legitimacy and acceptance of the mixed race condition. In addition to the challenge to the conceptual framework of the 'first wave', the explorations of the 'second wave' around the notion of a 'mixed race community' and the transcendence of race present a challenge to notions of race within the racial formation processes of the UK and USA as a whole.

The second point that needs to be reviewed is the challenge that is emerging to the 'second wave' from the 'new wave' itself. With a small but powerful body of the 'new wave' criticising the fixation on the personal right to identify as mixed that it sees as defining the 'second wave', a 'third wave' of conceptualising mixedness can be seen surfacing. Here, it is argued that the psychological focus on the personal mixed race condition is contributing to a narrow understanding of mixedness. Specifically, it is held that in its eagerness to celebrate mixedness, the 'second wave' is guilty of utilising many of the discursive tools that can be, and have been, used to denigrate the hybrid state, thus unwittingly reinforcing their

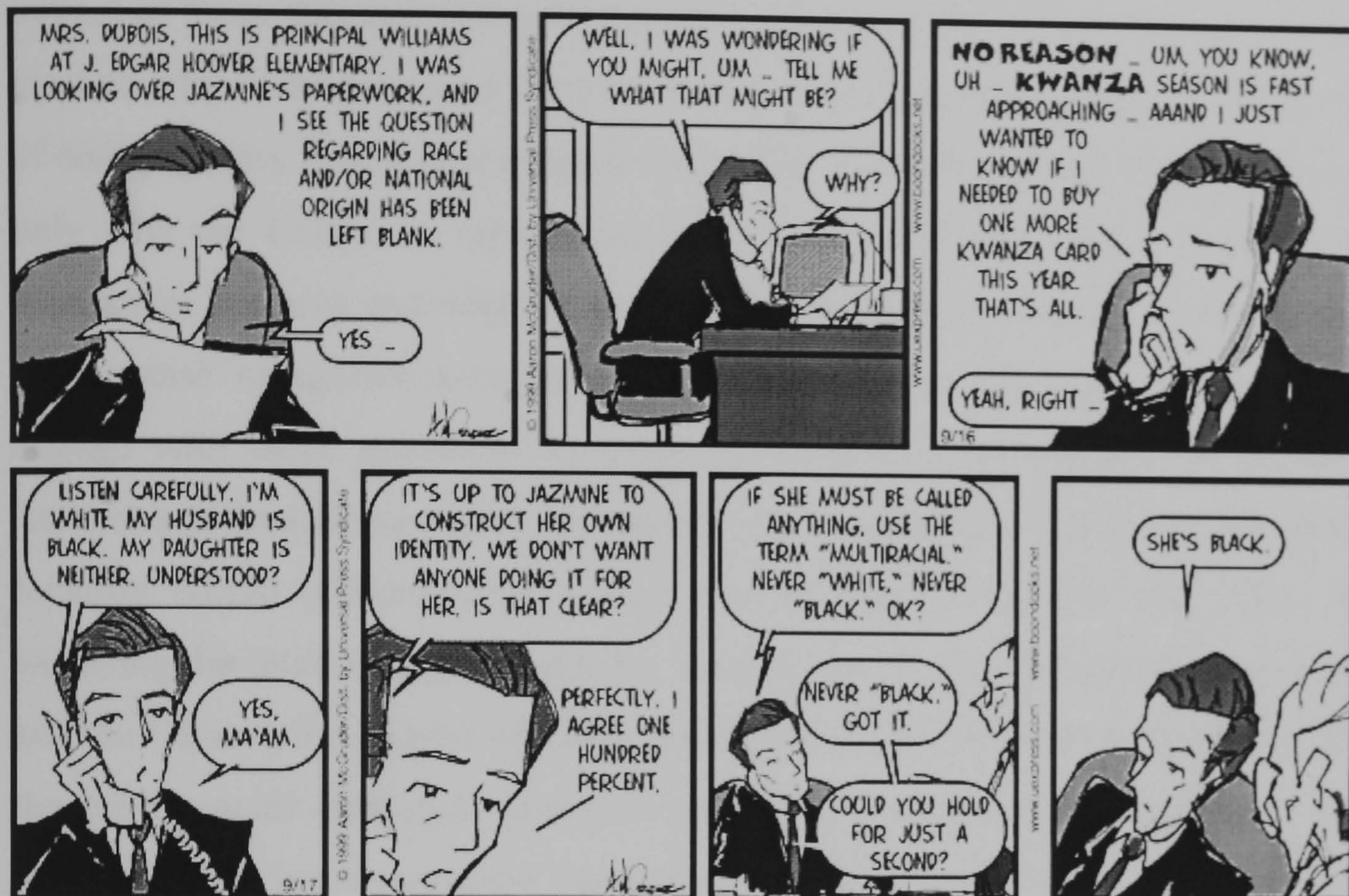
conceptual worth. Also, the 'third wave' argues that the 'second wave's primary focus on the personal leaves little room for important socio-political understandings of mixedness and, as such, primarily conceptualises it around the experiences of particular American groups. Consequently, this 'third wave' argues that it is important to approach mixedness through a framework that is able to utilise both personal and socio-historical conceptualisations of mixedness to move beyond personal understandings of the mixed race condition and locate its place and influence within wider racial formation processes.

Agreeing wholeheartedly with these pronouncements, the following chapters intend to adhere to Small's stipulation and are concerned with further exploring the mixed race projects of the UK and USA by focusing on some key 'structural contexts, institutional patterns, and ideological articulations as they are expressed in the light of local histories.' As such, the next three chapters present the original data of this research project and focus on the interaction between some important personal, institutional and political representations and organisations of mixedness. In this chapter, we saw how the 'second wave' and the Multiracial Movement in particular has challenged the pathological framework of the 'first wave' and, especially in academia, is rewriting the rules of engagement for approaches to mixed race. The following chapters will explore the ways in which this challenge is succeeding outside the confines of the 'mixed race network' as well as what the implications of this challenge are for mixed race and other racial projects. Chapter 4 will lead this exploration by examining the dynamics of mixedness in relation to the Census. What can we discern the debates over the official recognition of mixedness? Does an official 'mixed' or 'multiracial' option on a governmental form legitimise or politicise mixed race?



## Chapter 4:

### Mixed Race and the Census



*The Boondocks.*<sup>59</sup>

### Introduction

As illustrated in earlier chapters, the last decade has seen the 'second wave' put its concerns firmly on the identity politics agenda. In this respect, 2000 and 2001 – the years of the respective US and UK<sup>60</sup> Censuses – are of real significance for the 'second wave' and the Multiracial Movement in particular, marking as they do the culmination of demands for an official recognition of 'interracialism.' However, although the 'second wave' can be considered a transatlantic network, the different outcomes of the recent Census rounds suggest that the dynamics of

<sup>59</sup> *The Boondocks* ©1999 Aaron McGruder. Distributed by Universal Press Syndrome. Extract from MixedFolks.com <[www.mixedfolks.com/comics.htm](http://www.mixedfolks.com/comics.htm)>

<sup>60</sup> As Vidler (2001) notes strictly speaking, there are three Censuses in the UK – that of England & Wales, that of Scotland and that of Northern Ireland – although the content conduct and results of each are closely co-ordinated. As in his paper, this chapter concentrates on the Census in England & Wales, while highlighting any important differences between the three Censuses where necessary.



the mixed race projects in the two countries outside this network are more distinct than is commonly conceptualised. With the decision to adopt a four-tiered 'mixed' category in the 2001 UK Census and the rejection of the proposed 'multiracial' category in the US 2000 Census, the question of both the current impact of these decisions on contemporary understandings of mixedness and the reasons why these decisions were taken becomes a significant one. An analysis of contemporary mixed race projects in the UK and USA must then consider not only why the Census is such a focus for many advocates of the Multiracial Movement but how and why the decisions to include or reject the 'mixed' and 'multiracial' categories were made. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to engage with these questions by focusing both on the processes behind the decisions to include or reject the 'mixed' or 'multiracial' categories and their location within contemporary mixed race projects of the UK and USA. In exploring the relationship between the 'second wave', the Multiracial Movement and the Census, the chapter will discuss the emergence of these decisions within the larger racial formation processes of the two nation states and assess the effects of their implementation. As such, the nature of the relationships between the mixed race projects themselves comes also to the fore and the following question is considered – is it the case that 'mixed race' and 'multiracial' are not the interchangeable terms they might easily be seen to be, but are rather distinct terms that identify subtle but significantly different conceptualisations of interracialism in the UK and USA?

### **The Census and Ethnic and Racial Categorisation**

As the previous chapters demonstrated, contemporary conceptualisations of mixed race by the 'second wave' have operated very much within an encompassing framework of interracialism which highlights and challenges the notions of marginality, the concepts of purity and impurity and the hegemony of white family privilege that have dominated understandings of mixedness in both the UK and USA. Moreover, emerging from this framework is an 'activist' branch of the 'second wave': a Multiracial Movement which asserts the 'right' to have mixed race identity recognised and accepted as legitimate in both informal



and formal domains. With the US and UK decisions regarding the inclusion of mixed race on the Censuses now clearly in place, let us further explore the ‘activism’ of the Multiracial Movement and establish its role and influence in contemporary mixed race projects.

Although America has a longer tradition of quantifying race officially than the UK, the collection of statistics on race, and ethnicity in the UK context,<sup>61</sup> has become a widespread practice in both American and British institutions. Concomitantly, the collection of such data has led many to wonder not only about its usefulness, but also about its nature as a whole. Is ethnic monitoring a necessary component in the quest to create more inclusive institutions or an authoritarian aspect of social control, essentialising and perpetuating dominant norms of racial and ethnic categorisation? (Lee, 1993; Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; Skerry, 2000).

Like the US Census Bureau, which states that ‘all levels of government need information on race, Hispanic origin and ancestry to implement and evaluate programs, such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Act’<sup>62</sup>, the governmental body responsible for the largest collection of ethnic data in the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), asserts that ‘data on ethnic groups help to identify the extent and nature of disadvantage in Britain and to measure the success of equal opportunities policies.’<sup>63</sup> Moreover, whilst certain influential British and American organisations designed to protect the interests of minority ethnic groups are aware of the concerns surrounding the collection of such data, overall most adhere to the viewpoint that racial and ethnic records are an important tool in identifying and dealing with unlawful discrimination (CRE, 2002). For the most part, it is the case that both government and other official bodies hold that the intrusiveness and potential of racial reification that the collection of racial data presents is outweighed by the means to record racial and ethnic groups in

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<sup>61</sup> As later sections will demonstrate in further detail, the UK Census only added an ethnic group question in 1991. However, although it is framed in terms of ‘ethnic group’, as will be seen, many of these groups are defined in ‘racialised’ terms.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Race, Hispanic Origin and Ancestry: Why, What and How?’ US Census Bureau.  
<<http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/pdf/d3249c.pdf>>

<sup>63</sup> ONS <[www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001)>

order to address disadvantage. In the words of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) ‘As long as race counts, we have to count race’.<sup>64</sup>

Reflecting on these shared viewpoints regarding the necessity of racial and ethnic data collection, the role that a particular concept of equality plays within the modern democracies of the USA and the UK is clear to see. In both countries, the understanding of many institutions, users and respondents regarding ethnic and racial monitoring systems is one which conceptualises them firstly, as recording instruments and secondly, as tools through which any discrepancies in the equal status of the state’s citizens, that is, in both their access to state resources and treatment by other citizens, can be highlighted and, subsequently, rectified. The governmental aim of recording such data, argue the UK and US governments, is not to monitor and exert control over its racial and ethnic populations but to monitor and exert control over any disadvantages and inequalities they might face.

However, contained within these shared viewpoints lie certain assumptions regarding the relationship between the function of ethnic and racial monitoring and categorisation and the concept of equality, largely the supposition that these two elements are sequentially linked. The idea that contemporary ethnic and racial monitoring and categorisation in the UK and USA is primarily conducted in order to protect minority groups against disadvantage and discrimination and, as such, that it is first and foremost a tool through which equality is managed is part of what Skerry calls the ‘naïve’ perspective regarding the role of the Census and ethnic and racial monitoring as a whole. This perspective, widely voiced by statisticians and demographers, tends to emphasise the role of rights and science in the Census and, as such, maintains that the Census can and ought to be above politics (Skerry, 2000). Indeed, ONS has claimed that the ethnicity group question is ‘very much a subjective sort of question, there are no official race or ethnic categories...it’s just a statistical exercise, a statistical classification’<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Julian Bond, chairman of the board of the NAACP, keynote address, 93 Annual NAACP convention, Houston, 13 July 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Personal interview, ONS representative, November 2002.



However, a more 'realistic' perspective, according to Skerry, views the Census, in its attempts to locate individuals in specific social categories through the drawing of specific boundaries, as a political event, first and foremost. As such, argues Skerry, the Census should be understood not only 'as a critical tool in the administration of governmental benefits but also [as] an instrument of state power and authority' (Skerry, 2000, p7). The Census, then, is not so much a statistical exercise as a political one.

According to Bonnett and Carrington, the genesis of ethnic and racial monitoring within the modern state can thus be seen as embodying 'a political tension between an authoritarian aspect of social surveillance and control and an egalitarian principle of redistribution and open, transparent management (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; p488). Moreover, within this 'problematic necessity' of ethnic and racial monitoring exists a further layer of tension, that of the bureaucratic procedures of the modern state and the egalitarian ideals of its citizens in terms of both their subjective group and individual right to representation. The translation and implications of these subjective social identities into manageable categories by the state is challenging for both government and citizens alike. As Bonnett and Carrington point out, the production of racial statistics and categories is a complex reality as they 'can, and have been, produced as both forms of resistance to and signs of acculturation by government' (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; p489).

Returning to the discourse and demands made by the Multiracial Movement, the extent to which these tensions are currently in operation begin to make themselves seen. If we agree with Murdoch and Ward that 'counting' leads to the articulation of 'norms' whereby people are considered 'normal' if in their characteristics they conform to the central tendencies of statistical laws' and that those who do not 'are considered 'pathological'' (cited in Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; p489), the demands made by the Multiracial Movement to have its own 'legitimate' category is fully understandable. Moreover, this demand for legitimacy and recognition is 'undeniably consistent with the letter and spirit of self-identification' espoused by each nation-state (Skerry, 2000, p51). The question thus becomes why, in two countries which both uphold notions of group

and individual equality of rights and identity, the concept of ‘mixedness’ was normalised in the UK but not in the USA. The following sections will examine the processes of how the proposed ‘multiracial’ and ‘mixed’ categories became included or were rejected from the US and UK Censuses respectively before locating these decisions within the analytical framework of the US and UK mixed race projects.

### **Exclusion: ‘Multiracial’ and the US Census**

In a discussion on the representation of mixed race within official ethnic monitoring systems, it makes sense to start with the US Census decisional process, as it might well be argued that the official lack of recognition of interracialism in the US Census over the past few decades is the primary reason for the emergence, organisation and direction of both the ‘second wave’ and the Multiracial Movement. Indeed, it would appear that the failure to recognise mixedness directly in the 1990 Census led to a vociferous sustained campaign by ‘multiracial activists’ to have a multiracial category included on the 2000 Census, which was ultimately rejected by the state in favour of a ‘mark all that apply’ (MATA) option (Brown, 2003). The key questions here then are both why the demands for the category came about and why they were refused.

As Kertzer and Arel note, the United States ‘has the longest continuous history of placing its entire population into mutually exclusive racial categories based on pseudo-scientific theories of race’ (Kertzer and Arel, 2002: p11). Race and ethnicity have been a central part of the American decennial Census from its conception in 1790 until the present day. From the outset, when the framers of the US federal constitution introduced the notion of measuring race in such a way that a slave would count as three-fifths of a whole person and Indians not taxed would be excluded for purposes of Congressional apportionment (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000; p87), the US Census has been and continues to be ‘inextricably bound up with race’ (Skerry, 2000, p3). The ‘counting’ of the American population in the Census has thus long been not merely a statistical exercise, but one in which particular political and social concerns are expressed and managed. As Anderson and Fienberg point out, race has always been



measured by the federal government yet the labels of classification have changed as have the purposes justifying their measurement (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). The political and social concerns inherent in the classification of the American racial and ethnic population can clearly be seen in the history of classifying 'mixedness'. In this case, the ways in which people of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds have been managed by official data collection have been largely determined by conceptualisations of and attitudes towards blackness (Aspinall, 2003, p280). With, as we have seen in chapter 2, the rule of hypodescent firmly in operation in the United States, there is a long American history of conceptualising those of mixed race as inhabiting (usually black) monoracial categories, a rule which has also been upheld, and concomitantly inscribed, by the Census. From the 1930s until the recent Census, the only official option for those of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds has been to subscribe to a single racial category. Interestingly, however, the paradoxical logic surrounding the rule of hypodescent, which recognises whiteness whilst simultaneously denying it, led previous Censuses to record mixedness overtly. With the exception of the 1900 Census, from the 1850 to the 1920 Censuses, 'blackness' was conceptualised as two distinct categories – 'black' and 'mulatto'. As Nobles points out, the addition of the mulatto category in 1850 was not because of demographic shifts, 'but because of the lobbying efforts of race scientists and the willingness of certain senators to do their bidding' (Nobles, 2002; p51). With the polygenist view that human races were distinct and unequal species still widely accepted in mid-nineteenth century America (Gould, 1981), it was 'very desirable', as the Census Bureau made clear, that the particulars of 'mulattos' were recorded in order that more information on their contested reproductive abilities and the level of 'intermixing' was known (Nobles, 2002). Moreover, as previously discussed in chapter 2, the fears provoked by Emancipation over racial purity led to an even more specific coding of 'blackness' in the 1890 Census with 'blackness' broken down into the four categories of 'black', 'mulatto', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon'. Though the attempt to distinguish 'mixedness' was temporarily abandoned in 1900 for a sole 'Negro or of Negro descent' category due to the difficulty of enumerating ethnic percentages and

dissatisfaction with the quality of 1890 mulatto, quadroon and octoroon data. lingering fears over racial purity led to two last attempts to track interracialism, with a mulatto category reappearing in the 1910 Census and again, for the final time, in 1920 (Lee, 1993; Nobles, 2002). The extent to which the federal government went to calculate the amount of non-white blood can be clearly demonstrated by the terms employed from 1790 to 1990 in the decennial Censuses in Table 1.

The removal of the mulatto category from the 1930 census was officially explained by the Census Bureau as the result of dissatisfaction with the securing and accuracy of the data produced by the category (Nobles, 2002). However, as Davis has argued, the dismissal of 'mixed' categories by 1930 also indicates the hardening of the concept of hypodescent in American life and its acceptance by both blacks and whites (Davis, 2002). Indeed, with the removal of the mulatto category in the 1930s, 'the Census mirrored the racial *status quo* in law, society and science' i.e. that one drop of black blood made one black (Nobles, 2002: p56). However, as will be discussed in detail in chapters 6 and 7, it is not suggested that this acceptance was a simple process of white hegemony dictating racial classification, but a more complicated process of negotiation between whites, mulattoes and blacks culminating in the emergence of 'the New Negro', the resistance to and acculturation by government outlined in Bonnett and Carrington's argument posited earlier in this chapter. However, as the politics and identity of the 'New Negro' began to be replaced by the politics of the Civil Rights Movement a few decades afterwards, the resistance to and acculturation by government of racial and ethnic categorisation shifted once more.

If the ethnic and racial classifications of the Censuses prior to and during the mid-twentieth century were a means to separate by race and ethnicity those entitled to full social rights and privileges and those who weren't, the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s, which forced America to challenge its racialised past, ostensibly turned the role of the Census on its head. With racial classifications in the federal system called upon to meet the needs of the civil rights enforcement machinery and the 'right' of Americans to define their own identity, as opposed to it being ascribed to them, the Census became framed in



the language of 'rights' (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). Indeed, the new laws and programmes brought in by Federal civil rights legislation – most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – meant that racial and ethnic data was now required in order to monitor both legislative compliance and the delivery of new social services and programmes (Nobles, 2002; p57). Furthermore, as Nobles rightly points out, the enactment of these Acts and their subsequent amendments, extensions and court interpretations has resulted in the requirement of 'population tabulations by race at the level of city blocks for the purposes of redistricting and the possible creation of 'minority-majority' congressional electoral districts (Nobles, 2002; p57). With a clear link in the US federal system thus established between racial group percentages and resource allocation and electoral apportionment, inclusion and representation of racial categories in the US Census since the 1960s has shifted from a means of reflecting and supporting racial and ethnic discrimination to a means of redressing that discrimination. As such, this transformation has resulted in the tension outlined earlier between the Census's role as a form of state control and as a form of emancipation. Torn between its official function of supporting the demands of contemporary public policy and its popular function of reflecting the increasingly subjective notions of race and ethnicity (Skerry, 2000), the American Census is now undergoing something of an identity crisis, as the debate over the inclusion of a multiracial category clearly shows.

At the time of the first U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) policy created in 1977 to ensure standardised federal government data collection on race and ethnicity – commonly known as 'Statistical Policy Directive 15' – people of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds were required to select one category that 'most closely reflect[ed] the individual's recognition in his community' (in Robbin, 2000; p134). Although the Directive maintained the tradition of monoraciality in American society, its recommendation that self-identification, rather than assignment by an enumerator, be the preferred method of data collection meant that for the first time in the history of governmental record keeping, the individual became the authoritative source for personal racial and ethnic identity (Robbin, 2000, p134).

As with the emphasis on a 'flexible framework' designed to permit the enlargement of categories to ensure 'historical continuity and compatibility', the shift from racial assignment by observer to respondent was a permissive move (Robbin, 2000). Indeed, these shifts had important consequences for the nature of ethnic categorisation as a whole – with the individual articulating the preferred terms of racial identity, the neat racial categories long favoured by the state were not so easily employable. The tension over the role of the Census as seen by the state – largely as a statistical recording tool – and the role of the Census as seen by the individual and/or group – largely as a means of personal racial identity recognition – was thus firmly enshrined by Directive 15.

With the new elements of self-identification and flexibility of categories introduced into the Census by Directive 15, it is not surprising that criticism of the existing categories by those now doing the identifying began to gather momentum in the decades following its inception. In addition to demands made in the early 1990s by Arab American and Asian and Pacific Islanders to enlarge the categories to reflect their particular ethnic groups, grassroots organisations such as Project RACE and AMEA had also formed to lobby local school districts and state legislatures for the addition of a 'multiracial' category on administrative forms and began mobilising to influence congressional representatives (Robin, 2000: p136).

The mobilisation of pro-multiracial category grassroots organisations in the early 1990s began to be effective in attracting both media attention and registering its presence on the OMB Census review process agenda – the letters and petitions stemming from the nationwide letter-writing campaigns organised by these organisations constituted more than half the public comment received by the OMB on the issue of revising the existing categories (Robbin, 2000; p139). Moreover, in the mid-1990s, activist groups organised two 'Multiracial Solidary Marches' on Washington and California.<sup>66</sup> As a result, by the end of 1996, five out of the eleven states that had introduced legislation to require the addition of a

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<sup>66</sup> The first march on Washington took place on 20 July 1996 and the second in California on 9 August 1997. It is estimated by organisers and participants that around 500 people took part on each march. <[www.interracialvoice.com](http://www.interracialvoice.com)>; <[www.projectrace.com](http://www.projectrace.com)>



multiracial category to their educational or administrative forms had enacted laws to do so. Soon after, legislation was introduced at the federal level to require that respondents be given ‘an opportunity to specify, respectively, ‘multiracial’ or ‘multiethnic’ (Robbin, 2000; p142).

However, whilst lobbying and support for the inclusion of a multiracial category increased during the mid-nineties, concomitantly there was a growing increase in the political activism of those organisations who were opposed to it. At the three hearings held by the House Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology in April, May and June 1997 to review the proposed changes to the Directive, the major statistical agencies opposed altering the Directive on the basis of the practical and methodological challenges presented by establishing new categories (Robbin, 2000; p143). Opposition was also strongly presented from agencies tasked with civil rights compliance and major minority population interest groups such as The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on the grounds that the inclusion of a multiracial category would hamper the identification of black voters in terms of fair representation, thereby losing a significant degree of political empowerment for African-Americans.

At the end of 1997, after an extensive review process throughout the 1990s, OMB issued the official revision of Directive 15, rejecting the addition of a ‘multiracial’ category on the grounds that government research had indicated that less than 3% of the population identified as multiracial and that the term ‘multiracial’ was frequently misunderstood by respondents to mean ‘multiethnic’ (Aspinall, 2003; p291), making it redundant as an analytical term. It was however recommended that multiple responses be permitted for people of mixed racial identities with the result that the actual race question on Census 2000 reads, ‘What is this person’s race? Mark one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be’.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The ‘races’ that are available for checking are: White, (Black, African Am. or Negro), American Indian or Alaska Native (Print name of enrolled or principal tribe), Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Other Asian (Print Race), Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Charmorro, Samoan, Other Pacific Islander (Print Race), Some Other Race. There

Whilst the ‘multi-ticking’ option granted by the OMB was seen as a small victory for multiracialism at AMEA, Project RACE was disappointed that the term ‘multiracial’ did not appear on the Census form itself<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, there were many in the Multiracial Movement who were concerned with the ways in which the data would be tabulated in order to ‘bridge’ the racial and ethnic data from the previous 1990 Census. Rather than counting all mixed race people under a single ‘multiracial’ category as requested by organisations, an ‘unconventional concept’ (OFM, 2001) was introduced into the tabulations, whereby race is tabulated in three ways: race alone (exclusive category), race in combination (inclusive category), and race alone or in combination. The exclusive tabulation counts the number of people choosing one of seven mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories (White alone, Black or African American alone, American Indian & Alaska Native alone, Asian alone, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander alone, Some other race alone, Two or more races). The inclusive tabulation counts the number of choices people have made and can show the 57 possible combinations of the six race groups (White, Black or African American, American Indian & Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander, Some other race). The third approach, where respondents are tallied in each of any of the six race groups they have reported (e.g. people who reported Asian & Black or African American would be counted in both the ‘Asian alone or in combination’ and the ‘Black or African American alone or in combination’ populations) means that the total of this tabulation will exceed the total population of respondents.

Many of the concerns expressed by those within the Multiracial Movement regarding the tabulation of the data thus focused on which tabulation systems will ultimately be adopted by users. With several options available, organisations such as Project Race fear that, under pressure from minority monoracial groups, government agencies will ‘re-tabulate’ the inclusive data. This, they state, means

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is also a separate ‘Hispanic’ question, which is to be answered in conjunction with the race question –i.e. for respondents to mark whether they are of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin.

<sup>68</sup> As will be discussed further in chapter 6, the involvement of Project RACE with the political right as well as its continued pursuit of a ‘multiracial’ category has led to its increasing isolation on the fringes of the Multiracial Movement (Spencer, 2003). <[www.projectrace.com](http://www.projectrace.com)>.



that respondents ticking ‘black’ and ‘white’ categories will never be counted in either the majority ‘white’ category but be identified as black, as will those ticking, for example, ‘black’, ‘Asian’ and ‘American Indian’ as they would be re-tabulated in the minority group with the largest population. If this were the case, argues Project Race, government agencies will misuse the multiracial numbers to their benefit and all protection for multiracial people from disadvantage and inequality will be removed.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the OMB guidelines for reporting data on race indicate that there will be some discrepancies in the ways in which agencies and users report and interpret this data. The advice given by one agency, which collects data on disadvantaged children, to its user community is indicative of the ambiguity within the guidelines for the collection of multiracial data:

*Because the multiracial population is fairly small, concerns with data quality and confidentiality require judgement on the part of users to decide the amount of detail provided on the multiracial population. ‘Some balance will need to be struck between having a tabulation showing the full distribution of all possible combinations of multiple race responses and presenting only the minimum-that is a single category of people who reported more than one race’ (OMB, December 2000:7)<sup>70</sup>*

With the debates surrounding the tabulation of multiracial data still ongoing, it is difficult to assess accurately whether the claims of Project RACE are correct or indeed to pinpoint how the majority of agencies and users are engaging with the data is being used. What it is possible to discern, however, is that, despite the growing proliferation of usage of the term in popular and academic discourse, multiracial is not, as yet, an official racial category in the USA.

Interestingly, whilst the furore in reaction to the proposed multiracial category was developing in the USA, over in the UK a ‘mixed’ category crept quietly and with a minimum of fuss onto the 2001 Census. Indeed, despite the similarities in the literature of the ‘second wave’ on both sides of the Atlantic before the recent round of Censuses, the process and outcome of the UK situation was markedly different from that of its US counterpart. In addition to the lack of a vocal and

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<sup>69</sup> [www.projectrace.com/statefederalcensus/census](http://www.projectrace.com/statefederalcensus/census)

<sup>70</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation <[www.aecf.org/kidscount/categories/how\\_reported.htm](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/categories/how_reported.htm)>

organised Multiracial Movement lobbying for the inclusion of a multiracial category, there was no heavy media coverage and no real opposition to the, admittedly quiet, proposals to include the mixed category. With the debates and decisions surrounding the inclusion of a mixed category primarily taking place out of the public eye, the process behind its eventual acceptance is more obscure than was the one behind the rejection of the American multiracial category. In order to establish the process behind the inclusion of the mixed category, a small series of interviews with key actors involved in or aware of this decision was carried out as part of this research project. As described in chapter 1, to this end, three semi-structured interviews were carried out with key members of the ‘working group’ responsible for including and shaping the category – including two representatives from local authorities and one from the academic community – in addition to two interviews with representatives from the Office of National Statistics to whom the ‘working group’ ultimately reported. Additionally, further semi-structured interviews were held with those who were not consulted regarding the category’s inclusion but who might have expected to have been in light of their experience and knowledge of mixed race issues in the UK. Consequently, an interview was held with a member of the academic community who had experience of identifying the mixed race population on national surveys. Furthermore, written answers to a questionnaire distributed to and collated by members of ‘People in Harmony’, the largest mixed race organisation in the UK. The semi-structured interview schedules and written questionnaire can be seen in Appendices II and III. The key questions posed to respondents aimed to establish why the ‘Mixed’ category was included, who was involved in the decision to include it, what form the process took and what bearing they believed the inclusion to have on contemporary racial formation processes in the UK. It should also be noted that as several of the interviewees expressed concerns over the confidentiality of their viewpoints, the decision was made to incorporate these viewpoints within the presentation and critical analysis of the Census process as a whole and consequently, the majority of quotations are not directly attributed.



## **Inclusion – ‘Mixed’ and the UK Census**

Unlike the American Census, the history of the British Census is marked by its lack of ethnic and racial focus. Whilst every British Census since 1841 has asked people to state their country of birth – and until the special interim report in 1966, their nationality – it was only in 1991 that an ethnic group component was added to the Census<sup>71</sup>. Whilst it was possible to gauge to some extent the minority ethnic population in pre-1991 Censuses from the data on parents’ birthplace, inevitably this was not, as Sillitoe and White point out, always a consistent indication of ethnicity. In 1971, for example, many whites were included amongst those whose parents had been born in the Indian subcontinent, whilst most of those with parents born in East Africa were of Asian descent (Sillitoe & White, 1992). The realisation of the post-Windrush British state that both its ‘coloured’ immigrant population and their descendants were settling in the UK meant that the lack of reliable information on race and ethnicity became a area of concern of interest. The process of including a Census question to help monitor the scale of immigrants and ethnic minorities in British cities and ‘to assist the rectification of disadvantage experienced by ethnic minority populations and more generally help in the improvement of [...] ‘race relations’ thus began to unfold (Coleman and Salt, 1996). However, as Bulmer highlights, there was a great deal of concern surrounding this proposed question, both among sections of the white population who wished to assess and control the numbers of ‘coloured’ immigrants in Britain and among sections of the black population who were sceptical of how such ‘race’ data might be used (Bulmer, 1986).

Despite serious objections to the inclusion of a question on race and ethnicity, the process was underway and field trials soon went ahead (Bulmer, 1986). However, as Kertzer and Arel point out, from the outset the trials that were incorporated into the British Census illuminate the recurring failure in census taking to distinguish race from ethnicity. As Census officials were instructed to categorise minority groups as defined by the 1976 Race Relations Act, that is, those

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<sup>71</sup>Nobles points out that although the 1991 British Census was not the first to consider an ‘ethnicity’ question, it was the first to include one (Nobles, 2002; p66).

discriminated against on the basis of ‘colour’, ‘race’, ‘nationality (including citizenship) or ‘ethnic or national origin’. race, ethnicity/cultural nationality and citizenship were mixed together from the outset (Kertzer and Arel, 2002: p13). Consequently, the British Census has drawn no clear distinction between socially constructed race and ancestry or ethnic origin (Aspinall, 2003). The conflation of self-identified ethnic group/race and ancestry/ethnic origin as tested in the first field trials from the mid-1970s onwards were finally carried over into the 1991 Census ethnic group question. The heading of the final section thus referred to ‘ethnic or racial group’ and ‘ancestry and descent’, with the category options reflecting colour, geographical origins and colour (Aspinall, 2003).

During the run-up to the 1991 Census, there had been several experiments to acknowledge the ‘mixedness’ of respondents, largely through the instruction to write in ‘mixed racial or ethnic descent’ in a free text box shared with ‘any other race or ethnic group’. Moreover, in a question recommended by the Home Affairs Sub-Committee in 1983, a ‘mixed race’ closed option was included in a residual ‘Other groups’ category. However, this closed option, subsequently changed to an instruction to tick a separate box for ‘Any other race or ethnic group or if of mixed descent’, was modified in 1986 with the ‘mixed descent’ component removed, leaving ‘Any other race’ to stand alone in the final version of the 1991 Census (Aspinall, 2003; p277).

The results of the 1991 Census, however, appeared to contradict the assertions of the Office of Populations, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS), the government body responsible for the Census at the time,<sup>72</sup> that ‘people of mixed descent often preferred not to be distinguished as a separate group’ (Sillitoe & White, 1992 in Aspinall, 2003; p278). One in four members of minority ethnic groups reporting in the 1991 Census shunned the predesignated categories on offer (‘White’, ‘Black-Caribbean’, ‘Black-African’, ‘Indian’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Bangladeshi’ and ‘Chinese’) and wrote in a description under either the ‘Black-Other’ or ‘Any other ethnic group’ free text fields. Of those 740,000 people, almost a third – 230,000 – gave mixed origins descriptions, outnumbering the count for each of

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<sup>72</sup> OPCS merged with the Central Statistical Office in April 1996 to become the Office for National Statistics (ONS).



the Bangladeshi, Chinese and Black African groups (Aspinall, 2003: p278). However, as Aspinall makes clear, whilst some mixed groups ('Black/White', 'Asian/White', 'Mixed White' and 'Other mixed' were clearly identified in the 28 categories used in the coding frame for the free-text responses. OPCS was insufficiently interested in them as a group to create a new 'mixed' options category. As a result, he points out, these mixed groups were allocated to the main categories and lost to the Census user community, making it both difficult for data users to use statistics from the Census as denominators for rates to obtain comparable data (Aspinall, 2003; p279).

With such a significant number of people reporting mixed backgrounds and the loss of the significant proportion of comparable data for mixed groups, the ground was set for a review of the inclusion of a fixed and separate mixed category. Interestingly, initial extensive consultations in the mid-1990s suggest that, unlike the US situation, there was unanimous support for such a category amongst Census users, including government departments and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). Additionally, as the accompanying focus groups and cognitive tests revealed, mixed race people were also greatly in favour of a specific mixed category – when testing of the mixed category amongst mixed race respondents began to take place in 1995, an extremely high proportion were favourably inclined to its inclusion (Aspinall, 1996). Moreover, not only did mixed race people appear to be in favour of the category, but there was very little, if any, opposition to the inclusion of such a category from other minority ethnic people or the media at large. Indeed, the only concerns expressed were those of statistical users who were worried about maintaining comparability of categories. However, according to several working group members, it appears that these worries were presented as concerns and not as actual objections to the inclusion of the category itself.

Thus, with support from key quarters from the outset, the inclusion of the category, unfolded with a lack of opposition unimaginable in the USA. After extensive testing amongst mixed and 'monoracial' minority and majority respondents including focus groups, cognitive and qualitative interviews and household based postal surveys (Moss, 1999), the 2001 Censuses for England &

Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland included a 'Mixed' ethnic group as pre-designated category for the first time, with England & Wales offering the choice of four 'mixed' options: 'White/Black Caribbean, White Black African, White/Asian and Other mixed'; Scotland offering the choice of a 'Any Mixed background' with an additional 'write-in' space and Northern Ireland offering a 'Mixed ethnic group' category also with an additional free text 'write-in' space. Whilst recognising the powerful influence of the Multiracial Movement in creating a 'multiracial debate' in the USA, it appears that grounds for official recognition of mixedness in the UK in the form of a specific, separate category largely came as an internal move from within the Census organisation itself and from Census users rather than from an 'activist' source or pressure group. Attempting to trace the process of the inclusion of the mixed category in the UK thus presents a different set of focal points than does the US process of rejecting the proposed multiracial category. Indeed, with the decision to include a mixed category firmly on the agenda of the ONS, the key issues are not only a question of *why* the category was included but also *how* this inclusion took place. Before comparing the whys of UK 'mixed' inclusion and contrasting them with those of the US 'multiracial' rejection, the following section will further examine the rationale behind the officialisation of UK mixedness. Why has British mixedness become a four-tiered category and who was responsible for its inclusion as such?

Whilst ONS oversees both the planning and conducting of the Census, the process of establishing what ethnic categories needed to be included and/or modified was one which involved other bodies both affiliated to and outside ONS itself. This was done through the means of a 'subgroup' on the ethnicity question, tasked by the Census Offices in April 1995 to report back to the Working Group on Content, Question Testing and Classifications for the 2001 Census on the definition of what was required for the ethnicity topic and the classifications that should ideally be used in the question (Aspinall, 1996).

As with the larger Working Group, core members of the '2001 Census Working Subgroup on the Ethnic Group Question' were representatives of four of the five main Advisory Groups (i.e., the main consultative user groups) – central



government, local government, health authorities and academia. with only the private sector business user communities not represented. Additionally, representatives from other bodies and organisations with a particular interest and/or expertise in the area of ethnicity also provided representatives, such as the CRE, the Federation of Irish Societies, and the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Whilst the core membership of the Ethnic Subgroup was admittedly not large, it was part of a much larger process feeding back data and viewpoints to ONS, what ONS has called a ‘channelling of information’.<sup>73</sup> The Ethnic Subgroup, along with subgroups on other components of the Census, was thus used by ONS as part of ‘a mechanism for reaching out to the wider community’, relaying information back to ONS, whether acquired in the form of direct responses from official bodies to particular questions or through the more indirect, circuitous routes of reporting the more general perspectives of the channels of the official bodies themselves. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the information provided by the Ethnic Subgroup was supplemented by heavy scale public testing of the ethnic group question through cognitive interviews and focus groups with mixed race, minority and majority ‘monoracial’ respondents. Indeed, it would seem hard to fault the actual effort put in by ONS in terms of its testing of the question. One local government user and core member of the Ethnic Subgroup stated that the amount of work put into the ethnic group question was ‘astronomical’, that – compared to the other questions on the Census – it was ‘an industry on its own’.

Whilst applauding the efforts of ONS for its management of the introduction of the new ‘mixed’ category, from a sociological perspective, there are several critical points to consider, namely regarding the membership and consultations regarding the inclusion of the mixed category. The first is the membership of the Ethnic Subgroup. Whilst the Subgroup was made up of a core number of experts on Census categories, the number of people on the committee, or attending committee meetings, who had knowledge of mixed race matters or who were consulted regarding this was surprisingly few, despite the introduction of the

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<sup>73</sup> Personal interview, ONS representative, November 2002.

‘Mixed’ category being one of the biggest changes to the Census. Indeed, whilst there were several representatives from large organisations or groups representing the interests of the Irish community with regards to a new Irish category, also introduced for the first time that year, neither British academics with a background in mixed race identity issues – such as Tizard and Phoenix who conducted one of the largest studies of mixed race identity in the UK (Tizard & Phoenix, 1993) or Charlie Owen who has written on mixed race in official statistics (Owen, 2001) – nor organisations representing the interests of mixed race people – such as People in Harmony (PIH), the largest mixed race organisation in the UK – were contacted or asked to put their views forward. As PIH itself commented, ‘as the national charity for mixed race individuals and families, PIH’s input would have been valuable in determining the acceptability/pertinence of the question and terms used’.<sup>74</sup>

Considering the history of pathologising mixedness, the inclusion of these kind of representatives would undeniably have been constructive in the discussions amongst the sub-group in order to avoid, or at least confront, some of the sensitive issues of representation as considered in earlier chapters. Indeed, whilst the general consensus at the Subgroup meetings where the mixed category was on the agenda was that the category was an important and necessary one, it does appear that a certain, wider understanding of mixedness was often not grasped by those present, due both to the lack of direct knowledge of issues within this discursive terrain over the years and, to a certain extent, what one Subgroup member called the ‘cavalier’ nature of many of the meetings. Whilst, as noted earlier, a core membership of the Subgroup existed, the comments of some of these core members suggest that at many meetings where the mixed category was on the agenda there was either a sporadic or one-off attendance by interested parties with different perspectives and interests in mixedness. Although there was recognition amongst those attending the Subgroup meetings regularly that this did capture more viewpoints, it was also felt by some that this ad-hoc attendance resulted less in a deeper knowledge of the key issues and more in

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<sup>74</sup> Interview, PIH members, Dec 2002.



somewhat circuitous arguments with the old ground of debates related to the inclusion of the category being frequently traversed again.

The apparent limitations of the Subgroup's experience and knowledge of mixed race related issues inevitably lead us to consider the means by which the presentation of the question was decided. There were several key issues debated by the Subgroup. Firstly, there was the question of what terminology should be employed to report 'mixedness'. Whilst the Subgroup committee understood that the most common term of reference in the UK was 'mixed race', there was some hesitation over including the term 'race' within a section which clearly specified it was asking for 'ethnic' identity. The decision was thus taken to refer to those of mixed backgrounds as 'mixed' and omit the direct mention of race. Secondly, there was the question of which categories should be reported. Proposals were made along the lines of the write-ins received in the 1991 Census, which divided 'mixedness' up into three significant categories as we have seen. Interestingly, there was some contention over the order of each category, i.e. whether to label categories as 'White/Black' or reverse this so that the minority heritage was reported first. Whilst some Subgroup members made a case for the minority side to be reported first, arguing that this was often the side of their heritage which most mixed people related to or were seen to relate to, it was eventually decided by ONS that, as most of the 'mixing' in the UK was occurring amongst the white majority population and minority groups, the White category should be presented first. Similarly, suggestions that a category was included to reflect minority mixes such as Black/Asian were also rejected by ONS on the ground that not enough people had responded to this in the write-ins.

One of the more controversial decisions was that of dividing the white/black category into specific ethnic groups (black Caribbean or black African) but retaining a generic Asian category. Although it was argued by some Local Education Authority (LEA) representatives who attended several committee meetings that Asian in itself, was not a useful descriptive term and that a focus on specific Asian ethnicities would be more reflexive of respondents' self-identifications, the decision was made by ONS not to further separate the categories out.

The final point of discussion regarding the shape of the category concerned its place within the section itself. Interestingly, the decision was made to ask the question after the White section categories, in order to ‘catch’ those who might choose one of the minority ‘monoracial’ categories further down the list and not realise that a Mixed category existed. As illustrated in Appendix 1, the final form for England & Wales, along with those for Scotland and Northern Ireland distributed in April 2001 included a four-tiered ‘Mixed’ category as the second option of the ethnic group question.

In response to these new categories, a total of 677,177 people in England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland choose to identify as ‘Mixed’. Within the category options available in the England & Wales Census, the largest ‘Mixed’ response was under the White and Black Caribbean category (237, 420), followed by White and Asian (189,015), Other Mixed (155,688) and White and Black African (78,911).<sup>75</sup> For the first time, information on people identifying as ‘Mixed’ is available across a wide range of sociodemographic and economic variables (Aspinall, 2003; p291). Moreover, with not only a separate ‘Mixed’ category now included in the UK Census but the dividing of this category into specific ‘mixes’, it is clear that there is now a wide divergence in official attitudes towards reporting mixedness in the UK and USA, despite the apparent similarities of their polarised black/white racial formation processes. The next section will examine why this divergence has come about before the chapter reflects on the implications of the inclusion and rejection of officialising mixed race in the UK and USA respectively.

### **‘Officialising’ Mixed Race**

In order to understand why the outcomes surrounding the officialisation of mixed race in the UK and the USA have played out differently, it is necessary to locate the decisions within the respective mixed race projects operating in the two countries. As has been demonstrated in earlier chapters, mixed race projects in both the UK and the USA have unfolded within a framework where the polarised concept of white superiority and black inferiority have long caused mixedness to

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<sup>75</sup> Source: Census, April 2001, ONS.



be interpreted primarily as marginal, pathological and undesirable. However, as chapter 2 also highlighted, whilst this analogous concept of mixed race has existed between the two countries, it must be understood that overall, the concept is not so analogous that it should be understood as identical. Whilst several key factors over the twentieth century in particular have caused mixedness in both countries to be understood in similar terms – the development and exchange of American and British sociological and anthropological ideas on race, the popularity of the Eugenics movement, the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on defining blackness – there have always also existed subtle but important differences between these understandings due to the ways in which ‘mixedness’ is negotiated as part of wider negotiations within the racial formation processes of the UK and USA as a whole. Thus, as argued earlier in the thesis, whilst the over-riding element of mixed race formation processes in the UK and USA has been the attempt by white society to uphold and continue the hegemony of whiteness, the ways in which this has been attempted and challenged has played out differently in the two countries. Differences between the histories of minority settlement, in economic development and in attitudes towards class and gender have worked upon the racial formation processes in the two countries to produce subtle but significant variations in attitude towards mixedness. Whilst the complicated ways in which these circular processes of resistance, challenge, negotiation and accommodation of racial formation processes operate are not easy to link nor trace clearly, as this chapter has attempted to illustrate, a focus on the discursive and political terrain of the Census can help in illuminating them.

### *The Politics of the Census*

As discussed earlier, the Census is often envisaged to be a ‘reflective’ mechanism, used to count and report on various social aspects of the population. However, as the Census is a bounded documentary process which must set limits on what it reports on, and thus engages with particular statistical, user and social concerns (Southworth, 2001) and not others, then how purely reflective is it? As Bulmer points out, Census questions on race ‘cannot be considered apart from

the political climate and the circumstances under which [they] are conducted' (Bulmer, 1986; p477). Returning to the arguments of Skerry, far from seeing them as reflective tools, Census bodies must disengage with the idea that Censuses are apolitical mirrors of society and acknowledge that 'the essential, defining characteristic of any Census is the drawing of boundaries' which seek to 'situate individuals in specific social categories and political jurisdiction' (Skerry, 2000 p10-11). In this respect, Censuses can thus be seen as reflective mechanisms – not of the population *per se* but rather of the social phenomena and attitudes of the population within a particular given space and time. According to Skerry, Censuses are concerned with numbers in three dimensions – the *geographical space* of drawing external boundaries around and internal boundaries within the nation; the *temporal space* of when the Census is held and the *social space* of highlighting particular boundaries, such as race (Skerry, 2000). Viewing the Census in terms of these spaces both illuminates the political nature of the Census and the socio-political issues underpinning the racial formation processes of the time. Indeed, a study of American Censuses from their conception through to the current day is undeniably informative in terms of trying to illustrate the changing nature of American mixed race projects. The arguments over whether a 'multiracial' category should be included in contemporary Censuses have often failed to engage with the frequent appearance of such categories in earlier Censuses as discussed previously. However, what is interesting now is that the new calls for the introduction of categories that reflect interracialism in the States are not by those who seek to track and prevent it but by those who are part of and proud of it. With the Censuses in the UK and the USA now increasingly caught up with issues of race and ethnicity, particularly in the sense of these concepts being understood less as social concepts dealing with affiliation to psychological concepts dealing with identity (Skerry, 2000), it is becoming more and more difficult for the Censuses to maintain their position as apolitical, reflective tools. Although the concept of racial self-identification to which the UK Census has always subscribed in its shorter history of including this categorisation and which the US Census has gradually turned to appear to give support to the argument of an apolitical Census, this is not necessarily the



case. As Skerry points out, what kind of self is doing the identifying? The self who identifies on a community/social level of affiliation or the self that identifies on an individual psychological level? Moreover, how are the competing identities chosen and reported on the forms themselves? Whilst there is space on both the US forms and the UK forms to write in a racial and/or ethnic category which is not present, those that are present are unquestionably there as representative of what are legitimate and 'normal' forms of racial and ethnic identity. Furthermore, as Kertzer and Arel point out, to what extent does what they call the 'instrumental dimension' of a Census, that is, its relationship to entitlement and apportionment within the modern state, influence who is and wants to be counted? (Kertzer and Arel, 2002; p30). Indeed, as Petersen has noted, invitations by the US Census Bureau to allow representatives of special minority ethnic interest groups to act as formal consultants has aggravated 'promotional campaigns' that stress the monetary advantage of larger counts 'thus encouraging the creation of 'instant' members of the various categories' (Petersen, 1987; p233). Clearly, the debates that emerge each decade regarding the challenge to the dominant racial norms built into the Censuses and the success of and/or failure to negotiate new norms provide an important window into the ways in which racial projects form and unfold. Approaching the Census decisions towards mixedness then not as separate, statistical events made by the Census Bureau and ONS but as rooted within the specific requirements of racial projects, both contemporary and historical, leads to greater analytical understanding of the outcomes of the Censuses of 2000 and 2001.

In light of contemporary racial projects in the States, the decision regarding the proposed officialisation of multiracialism was inevitably likely to end in failure, being as it was a challenge to several fundamental 'norms' of contemporary American racial projects. Firstly, the inclusion of a multiracial category can be seen as a threat to the white hegemonic order which stipulates that there is a binary divide between white and non-white. The inclusion of a multiracial category challenges this binarism by recognising that this divide is frequently crossed and that race is not the immutable, fixed category that the concept of white hegemony would have it be. A multiracial category recognises the crossing

of boundaries in the same way that the one-drop rule attempts to deny it. The inclusion of previous categories of *mulatto*, *quadroon* and *octoroon* which marked the crossing of these boundaries were done so precisely because the white hegemonic order was concerned about the frequency of these crossings and wished to identify the extent to which 'blackness' was pervading on 'whiteness'. The removal of the category did not mean that the ruling order no longer cared about the pervasiveness of blackness within white society but rather that, with the one-drop rule established as a social norm, it was no longer necessary to track separate categories of blackness. What is interesting about the contemporary debates surrounding the re-introduction of a recognition of 'interracialism' into the US Census is not only that, as mentioned previously, the call for this is from those of mixed backgrounds and not from the white ruling order but, as shall be discussed in detail in chapters 6 and 7, that the main opposition to the category also stems not from the ruling order but from minority groups, particularly those of black Americans. The inevitability of this opposition is quite clear when viewed within the wider frame of current racial formation processes in the States. With all minority groups in constant negotiation processes with the white hegemonic order regarding their economic, social and political statuses – which are subtly but inextricably linked – the gains and losses of each group have significant effects on those of others. Consequently, the opposition on the part of many powerful black American organisations and leaders is premised on the argument that, if such a category was introduced, a large number of those currently identified as 'Black' or 'African American' would shift to this category, thus threatening both the political unity and strength of the group and the share of federal largesse that is based on numerical representation (Aspinall, 2003, p270). On the other hand, with nothing to lose in political or economic power terms, even something possibly to be gained through the splitting of minority powers, many white Americans were largely in favour of the introduction of the category, particularly in terms of supporting the concept of the 'personal right' to identify as one chooses. In this respect, it is perhaps not so anomalous that, Newt Gingrich, a former Speaker of the House of Representatives noted for his opposition to multiculturalism, testified before the



congressional hearing on Federal Measures of Race and Ethnicity on Multiracial Identification, stating that it was necessary ‘for the government to stop perpetuating racial divisiveness [...] Ideally, I believe we should have one box on federal forms that simply reads: "American.”<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, the tension resulting from the shift in conceptualisations of race mentioned earlier, between race as a form of socio-political affiliation or race as an expression of personal identity, is clearly represented in the testimony of Harold McDougall, director of the Washington office of the NAACP at an earlier congressional hearing who stated:

*The NAACP has great sensitivity on the issue of multiracial categories, and we support the right of individual self-identification and support self-determination in defining one's racial makeup. But the census may not be the correct place to make such a personal statement, particularly in light of the fact that repercussions in census numbers impact the lives of many people. Provisions of the Voting Rights Act, for example, are specifically directed at correcting past discrimination (particularly in the deep South) where African Americans were denied their constitutional rights. With some figures showing 70 percent of African Americans as possibly fitting into a multiracial category, will we be able to identify black voters in terms of fair representation?<sup>77</sup>*

Through this comparison of the US and UK Censuses, it is clear then that there is what Nobles calls ‘a sinuous relationship between racial ideas, census-taking and public policy’ (Nobles, 2002; p66). In terms of explaining the decisions made over ‘mixedness’ in the US and UK Censuses, this three-way relationship must be taken into account. As discussed in chapter 2, whilst the dominant norm of white superiority and black inferiority has been defining ‘racial ideas’ within both historical and contemporary British and American racial projects, the specific socio-historical development of minority settlement in the UK – in terms of origins, stereotypes and numbers – has meant that Britain has seen a ‘more

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<sup>76</sup> Statement of Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Hearing on Multiracial Identification, 25 July 1997.

<sup>77</sup> Statement of Harold McDougall, Director of Washington Bureau, NAACP, before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Hearing on Multiracial Identification, 22 May 1997.

flexible attitude to the classification of the black population' (Aspinall, 2003, p289) than in the US. Indeed, this flexibility is keenly demonstrated through the fragmentation process that contemporary British 'blackness' has notably undergone, with the emergence of a distinct and separate sense of 'Asianness' in the late 80s, for example (Modood, 1992). Whilst there were and have been issues of political group affiliation around this fragmentation, it is also the case that the quest for a more 'personalised' expression of racial or ethnic identity was a key factor in this splintering of blackness. With the notion of ethnicity as a key social marker within the racial formation processes of the UK, the four categories of mixedness that the Census presents to respondents, far from being a 'new' way of conceptualising race and ethnicity, merely reflect the move towards racial formation processes that recognise the fluidity and changing nature of ethnicity, albeit racialised, around which the UK categorises its citizens. This fluidity and flexibility is clearly opposed to the more fixed and immutable concept of race that defines the identities of individuals and groups in the US where in accordance with the 'one drop rule' a person with any known black African ancestry has long been considered black. Whilst the notion of hypodescent can also be seen to have taken root within the racial formation processes of the UK – as evinced by arguments against transracial adoption or fostering, for example – as Davis demonstrates, the United States is unique in having it so heavily woven into the social, scientific and legal history of the country (Davis, 2002). As he points out, 'arbitrary and contradictory as [the one drop rule is], it is deeply embedded in the social structures and cultures of both the black and white communities in the United States and strongly resistant to change' (Davis, 2002: p16). As illustrated within this chapter, it is evident that underlying much of the strong opposition to the inclusion of a multiracial category in the US stems from the entrenched hold that the one-drop rule has there.

It must be noted that the reflection of these racial formation processes, however, is quite different from the apolitical reflection of the population asserted by the two Census bodies. According to ONS, the mixed category came about purely as a response to the changing make-up of the population. However, as outlined earlier, whilst it is certainly the case that the UK Census bodies responded to a



trend in the reporting of 'mixed race' emerging from the 1991 Census, the 'mixed' categories that eventually appeared reflect rather the dominant norms of race, or of racialised ethnicity, that underpin British society. Indeed, the debates that emerged in Sub-group meetings over the ways in which the 'mixed' category should be presented to respondents regarding both wording, placing and category breakdown demonstrate that there was not so much a reflectivity of mixedness going on but rather a shaping and moulding of it. The decision to separate 'blackness' into two specific categories – White and Black Caribbean. White and Black African – whilst retaining a generic sense of Asianness – White and Asian – and 'otherness' – Any other mixed background – reflect the current norms through which mixedness is seen in the UK. Whilst the decision of the group to omit a specific minority mixes such as Black and Asian for example was taken on the basis that these numbers would be too insignificant, there is also a theoretical underpinning which suggests that the mixing of minorities is less important than the mixing of Whites and minorities. The maintenance of white hegemony and whiteness as a dominant norm is also illustrated by the final shaping of the mixed categories, with the phrasing of 'White and...' as opposed to 'Black Caribbean and...', etc.

Similarly in the US, OMB claims that its racial and ethnic categories have been developed in order to standardise 'record keeping, collection, and presentation of data on race and ethnicity' for administrative and statistical purposes (Nobles, 2002; p58). However, as Nobles highlights, as these categories are used to comply with expressed congressional and executive needs, they are as much political instruments as they are the simple statistical markers that OMB prefers to claim them to be. With OMB ultimately deciding that some groups have a case for representation – such as the newly added Hispanic category in 1980 – and other groups do not – such as, of course, the single multiracial category – the US Census, similarly to the UK and other Censuses, not only reflects but helps mould the racial ideas of its society. In its creation and subsequent recognition of official races and ethnicities, the US Census – as the UK Census – acts as a 'gatekeeper' to an official statistical existence, making itself a powerful and, at times, highly contentious policy and social tool (Nobles, 2002; p59)

Indeed, as noted previously, the ‘instrumental dimension’ of Censuses must also be taken into account in conjunction with racial ideas when considering the difference in the legitimisation of mixedness in the UK and US Censuses. As Kertzer and Arel note, the recognition of certain racial and ethnic group identities within Censuses entails group entitlement to certain rights in many societies (Kertzer and Arel, 2002; p30). Consequently, with resource allocation and electoral apportionment in the US operating as a direct result of Census figures, the fear that ‘African American’ entitlement might be weakened by a multiracial category helps explain both the significant ‘black monoracial’ group opposition to the category as well as the support by many within the Republican party. Similarly, the lack of direct apportionment in line with racial/ethnic categorisation in the UK helps clarify the general lack of expressed concern or organised mobilisation amongst minority or majority ethnic groups in the UK. Consequently, it would appear that as ‘mixedness’ is now seen increasingly in the UK as an expression of personal identity than of political group affiliation, the tension between ‘multiraciality’ and ‘monoraciality’ is less apparent than it is in the USA. Indeed, with its appearance on the Census, it would now appear that ‘Mixed’ has now been enscribed by the British state as a legitimate category, just as ‘multiracial’ is currently inscribed by the American state as an illegitimate one.

To return to our initial point of departure, what then do the attempts to officialise and the actual officialisation of mixed race mean? Through this analysis of the discursive and political terrain of the Census as it applies to mixedness, it is clear that there are two key points that need to be considered. The first is the highlighting of the increasingly key differences between the mixed race projects in the UK and the USA. Whilst understandings of mixed race identity have often operated similarly in both countries and even been dominated by a framework which has emerged from the USA, the disparity in the Census decisions indicate that ‘mixedness’ is actually conceptualised quite differently within the two. Indeed, the Censuses mark what may very well be noted as a key time for understandings of mixed race here and in the States, with ‘mixed race’ and



‘multiracial’ identifying subtle but significantly different notions of mixedness, if not on a personal level than at least on a political and institutional one.

The following chapters will return to this then and, as they do, will also consider the other significant point raised by this analysis of mixed race and the Census, that is, the question of who owns racial identity – is it a subjective issue, a bureaucratic issue or a matter for communities? As individuals and groups, mixed race and otherwise, struggle to determine their dominance in this area, the constant negotiation processes between these different levels of ownership has significant implications for the ways in which mixedness is understood. Whilst the thesis so far has attempted to outline how ‘internal’ and ‘external’ understandings of mixedness (Aspinall, 2003) have interacted so far to produce the outcomes of the Census, the following chapters will attempt to understand what the implications of ‘mixed’ and ‘multiracial’ decisions are for the personal and political. Before turning to the question of how the mixed race and multiracial decisions are challenging political notions of race and mixed race, the following chapter will focus on how the ‘second wave’, the Multiracial Movement and the Census decisions are affecting personal notions of mixedness. Contrasting the official debates around the Census decisions with those of mixed race individuals, the question is asked: do the official, boundaries and understandings of mixed race in the UK and USA differ significantly from the unofficial ones?

## Chapter 5:

### Mixed Race and the Internet – Identity and Community On and Offline

*Virtual communities affect the minds of individuals, the interpersonal relationships between people, and the social institutions that emerge from human relationships.*  
(Rheingold, 2000; p351)

#### Introduction

As argued in previous chapters, the attempt to understand mixedness within both personal and wider social contexts enables a deeper comprehension of what it means to be mixed race, one which ‘makes sense’ outside the confines of the ‘mixed race network’. By locating the mixed race condition within the wider racial formation processes of the UK and USA, some of the ways in which personal, institutional and political meanings of interracialism interact have begun to be identified. Through its focus on the Census, chapter 4 continued to demonstrate the usefulness of mixed race projects in understanding mixedness and the complexity of the mixed race condition as a whole.

In its exploration of contemporary formations of ‘mixedness’, chapter 4 also highlighted the inextricable link between the Multiracial Movement and the ‘officialisation’ of ethnic and racial categorisation. As argued previously, the very creation of the Multiracial Movement emerged primarily from a dissatisfaction amongst activists over the lack of opportunity for official multiracial recognition. As the examination of the activist and academic debates in chapter 3 demonstrated, placed firmly at their centre is the presence of the ‘mixed race voice’, upon which great importance has been laid as a means of countering the projections of pathology that stemmed from the hegemonic monoracial voices of the ‘first wave’. However, with this ‘second wave’ coming increasingly under the spotlight, the nature of this voice also comes under new scrutiny. As previously argued, with many of those who contribute to the ‘second wave’ being from a similar background - female white/black, middle-class and college educated Americans – it may be more accurate to view the experiences of



the 'second wave' as representative of a particular aspect of the mixed race condition rather than of a 'mixed race condition' in general. Indeed, as evinced by the emergence of the 'third wave', there is a growing acknowledgement of the limitations of the mixed race voice that has come to symbolise and interpret the mixed race condition so far. How to address the growing sense of exigency to widen the debate to include those who, even within a discourse which emphasises the 'mix', are still seen as 'other' or who are not part of the 'academy', is a key challenge for contemporary mixed race studies. However, as has been raised within the 'second wave' itself, redressing the traditional pathology of mixedness through the focus on the mixed race voice is itself fraught with difficulties, both in terms of forming a consensus on who is or isn't 'mixed' and in terms of accessing significant numbers of this voice, in all its different socio-economic, gender, racial, ethnic and age permutations (Root, 1992).

If we agree that mixed race project theory gives us a deeper understanding of mixedness, in terms of its linking of personal and socio-political understandings of mixedness to other racial projects, then identifying other discourses of mixed race beyond the 'second wave' is necessary. We have already looked at some discourses outside the mixed race experience, through the focus on the 'first wave', and in the following chapter will discuss in more detail discourses of both white and minority ethnic voices. Moreover, in light of the highlighted limitations of the 'second wave' itself, it is also critical to attempt to identify and access the other dimensions of the mixed race voice beyond what may be considered the elitist confines of the 'second wave'. In redressing this imbalance, it may be that the Internet has a part to play – not only in terms of accessing this voice on a larger and more diverse cultural and geographical scale, but also in terms of understanding how contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness are considered, particularly along the lines of whether the debates that can be found outside the elitism of activism and academia are an extension of or a challenge to the debates found within the 'second wave'. Within the (cyber)space of 'common mental geography' that exists online, (Benedikt, 2000 p29), a previously inconceivably diverse body of people has the potential to come

together and engage in communication. With US Internet users estimated at about 165m, and those in the UK thought to be about 34m.<sup>78</sup> the Internet offers a vast possibilities for mixed race individuals scattered diversely throughout these countries (and the rest of the world) to ‘meet’. This opportunity is already being realised as an increasing number of mixed race people log on to the expanding myriad of websites, forums, message boards and chat rooms devoted to the mixed experience. Existing in the largely faceless realm of cyberspace, these ‘meetings’ frequently confer the freedom of anonymity upon participants, allowing an often unconstrained and franker posting of opinions on delicate and inflammable discursive areas of the mixed race experience. Whilst, as shall subsequently be discussed, there are certain problematic methodological and theoretical issues facing cyber-based research, in respect of the prospective ability of the Internet to tap into and track the mixed race voice outside of the confines already described, it is an area that should certainly be given serious consideration.

This focus of this chapter is thus an exploration of the mixed race voice in the cyberspace domain in order to establish how mixedness is being constructed there and to what extent its construction follows or detours from the constructions of mixed race found in the more ‘elite’ domain of the academic and activist ‘second wave’ as outlined earlier. The chapter shall first discuss the concept of cyberspace and the merits of conducting research in cyberspace before presenting some of the main debates of the mixed race voice online and analysing their place and importance within contemporary UK and US mixed race projects.

### **The Internet: Definitions and Methodology**

Whilst many such as Wilbur (2000) argue that there is a need to be particularly critical in the tools we use to explore Internet culture, even attempting definitions of the shifting terrain of ‘the Internet’ is fraught with difficulty. Indeed, although the term ‘cyberspace’ is commonly used to refer to the online world of the Internet, there is no common census over what is meant by cyberspace. First

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<sup>78</sup> Nielsen NetRatings, < [www.nielsen-netratings.com](http://www.nielsen-netratings.com) >



appearing in a novel by the science fiction writer William Gibson (1984) – who defined it as a ‘consensual hallucination’ – many who are interested in studying cyberspace are reluctant to restrict the word to a unitary definition, seeing that as a particularly unhelpful practice for an area which is in constant flux (Hakken, 1999). Indeed, this state of flux is illustrated on a basic level by the different terms used to describe the ‘virtual’ as opposed to the ‘real’ world. Whilst being ‘on the Internet’, ‘in cyberspace’, ‘on the Web’, ‘logged on’ or ‘online’ are terms that all indicate an engagement in ‘computer-mediated communications’ (CMC), it is nevertheless argued that there are subtle but tangible differences between aspects of this engagement (Holmes, 1997; Bell & Kennedy, 2000). As the focus of this thesis is not the nature of CMC, it seems prudent to avoid attempting definitive definitions of our preferred term ‘the Internet’ and instead adapt Moerman’s approach by defining the Internet not in terms of cataloguing its characteristics, but in terms of asking why and how it engages with and influences the analytical research field which, obviously in this case, is mixed race (Moerman in Hine, 2000).

Such an approach is what Hine refers to as ‘virtual ethnography’, which she sees as an investigation of the ways in which the technology of the Internet is experienced in use (Hine, 2000; p4). Hine identifies two distinct ways in which the Internet is generally approached analytically, the first view being that of the Internet as representing a place where culture is formed and reformed – cyberspace – and the second that of the Internet as a product of culture – a ‘cultural artefact’ – that is, ‘a technology which is shaped by the ways in which it is marketed, taught and used’ (Woolgar in Hine, 2000; p9). For Hine, studies of the Internet have focused primarily on the Internet as cyberspace and have largely neglected it as a cultural artefact, meaning by this that studies have often engaged with the Internet in either ‘online’ or ‘offline’ contexts. As Hine argues, what is needed rather is an approach that encompasses both the online and offline, a ‘rethinking of the relationship between ethnography and space’ (Hine, 2000; p10).

Indeed, the division between the real world and cyberspace is not as clear-cut as is often commonly imagined. On the one hand, the proposed democratising

potential of the Internet is hampered by the greater opportunity of some to 'log on' than others (Hakken, 1999; Sterne, 2000). The potential to engage with the Internet is often limited by occupation, class, age, location and indeed ethnicity (Warf & Grimes, 1997; Nakamura et. al 2000). Whilst there are signs that the domination of cyberspace by white American professional men (Warschauer, 1999) is increasingly being challenged by the 'internet settlement' of traditionally marginalised diasporic groups (Adams & Ghose, 2003: p433). it is nevertheless the case that some social groups are more under-represented online than others (Warf & Grimes, 1997). Yet the mooted capability of the Internet to fill its potential as a democratising force is not, as some argue, as simple as addressing the economic and cultural problems of access (Warschauer, 1999). Power, political and social issues that exist 'in real life' are not simply discarded when logging on (Nakamura et al., 2000). Consequently, an analysis of the production of mixed race (and other racialised discourses) in cyberspace must not only ask the question of exactly who is connected to the net and who is not, but must ask to what extent those that do manage to 'log on' are susceptible to the same social dynamics that operate offline. Thus even if the promises by recent British and American governments (to ensure that all their citizens shall eventually travel on the 'Information Superhighway')<sup>79</sup> were fulfilled, 'equal access' would not necessarily mean equality of opportunity.

Thus whilst it is tempting to see cyberspace as an entirely new form of communication, within which the specifics of time, place, gender, age, sexuality, class and race are eliminated (unless otherwise deliberately chosen), neither the invisibility or mutability of online identity makes it possible for 'the real world' to be escaped completely (Nakamura et al., 2000; p4). With the relationship between the Internet as a 'cyberspace' and the Internet as a 'cultural artefact' playing an increasingly important role in the way in which our 'real world' is ordered (Rheingold, 2000), it is clear that there is much to be gained from engaging with the Internet as a sociological area of analysis.

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<sup>79</sup> Al Gore, Information Superhighway Summit, UCLA, Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 1994; Tony Blair, Knowledge 2000 conference, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2000.



Within the framework drawn up by this research topic, it is thus held that an investigation of the construction of mixed race in cyberspace and ‘in real life’ – and most importantly the interactive processes between the two – can provide some important insights into the development of contemporary mixed racial projects and the meanings they are infused with. This is done in two ways. Firstly, by exploring personal conceptualisations of mixed race *in cyberspace* to discern who is identifying as mixed race, what their topics and concerns related to mixedness are and the extent to which the contributors and discussions arising within ‘accessible’ realm of cyberspace resemble or differ from the ‘closed’ realms of the Multiracial Movement, academia and the Census. The second phase of analysis concentrates on conceptualisations of mixed race arising from the Internet as a *cultural artefact*, that is, with the goal of discerning the influence that both these cyber mixed race discussions as well as the technology of the Internet itself, are having on conceptualisations of mixed race ‘in real life’. The following sections of this chapter will present the findings from this research into the perceptions, constructions and implications of mixed race in cyberspace after a brief discussion of the methodology involved in cyber-based research.

### *Conducting Research in Cyberspace : Methodology*

As with all areas of research, cyber-based research demands strategic choices are taken by the researcher. These choices exist not only in terms of defining the field of study, but also in terms of the nature of the observatory method by which the field itself will be viewed.

The question of defining the field of study in relation to this research project was raised earlier in this chapter, in connection with the potential of Internet-based research to provide access to a more diverse and larger pool of the mixed race population than is usually available in the small-scale studies that have largely informed the ‘personal’ conceptualisations of mixed race in the field so far (Root, 1992). However, as pointed out earlier, with the democratic potential of the Internet tempered by the different opportunities open to groups and individuals to log on, mixed race Internet-based research is similarly hindered.

Whilst it was beyond the limits of this research to establish definitively the socio-economic, gender, age and racial/ethnic backgrounds of all the mixed race people that were encountered in the course of this cyberbased study, it was clear from the beginning of the research that many, if not the majority, of those mixed race persons who participate in discussions of mixedness online are not dissimilar to those who form the backbone of many studies 'in real life', that is, school to college age, educated, middle-class American females of black/white parentage. Initially, it seemed as if this discovery foiled the aim of the cyberstudy, (i.e. to investigate other personal conceptualisations of mixedness outside the 'elitism' of the 'second wave') – if the voices online were more or less the same as those offline, cyber-discourse would merely be an extension of the academic and activist discourse 'in real life'. However, whilst these voices are evident online, that is not to say that they are the only participating voices – with a noticeable number of online participants appearing to come from outside the 'core' contributing body of mixed race discourse, the inclusion of cyber-discourse as a means to access other voices outside the 'elitist' discourse of academia may still be considered valid. Of these 'other' contributors, the 'hapa' (East Asian/other) contingent proved to be a significant body, reflecting the growing body of literature in academia in this area.<sup>80</sup> Importantly, 'other' mixes – largely absent from 'second wave' discourse – could be observed as a vocal contributing body, to the extent of developing specific mixed terms with which to refer to its heritages, such as 'Blatino' (Black and Latino) and 'Blaxican' (Black and Mexican). With additional contributions coming from countries other than America and a frequent and vocal male contributing body also apparent, it was clear that a discourse of mixedness which challenged the the 'second wave' discourse in both content and contributors was in place online. Consequently, it was consequently felt that, although not without limitations, the original premise of the Internet as an access to a wider mixed population could be upheld. With the Internet established as a valid analytical area within the theoretical framework of the research project as a whole, the question of defining the field of enquiry in relation to the observation method arose. As discussed previously,

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<sup>80</sup> See Williams-León & Nakashima (2001).



deciding what constitutes the Internet is highly problematic, due to the myriad of ways in which it is enacted and interpreted (Hine, 2000). Indeed, the initial search for the keywords of the ethnographic study – ‘mixed race’, ‘mixed heritage’, ‘biracial’, ‘multiracial’ and ‘interracial’ identity’ resulted in a wealth of information sites – web pages featuring essays, articles, films, reviews, photos and poems; newsgroups, message boards and forums with ‘real’ or ‘delayed’ chat time – specifically on or related to the topic of ‘mixedness’. However, for the purposes of this research, it was decided that the key focus would be on ‘discussion space’ – message boards and forums where either key questions are debated, and/or personal histories and experiences are presented and discussed. The decision to use these ‘active’ spaces, rather than the more ‘static’ web pages, as the research field was made in an attempt to capture a wider discursive ‘mixed’ voice as outlined earlier. By focusing on the interaction between contributors in ongoing online discussions, it was thought that a greater sense of the development of key debates in cyberspace would more readily be grasped.<sup>81</sup> It was hoped that by their very make-up of often rapid responses, relative anonymity and casual formatting, these cyber-spaces allowed for more informality than the often detailed, carefully laboured and structured web pages, many of which were academic in tone and appearance.

In addition to delineating the field, the means of observation was also a key methodological consideration. Whilst, as Hine has pointed out, an intrinsic part of research conducted ‘in real life’ is ‘face-to-face’ interaction, she notes that researchers in cyberspace ‘can, of course, lurk in a way that face-to-face ethnographers cannot readily achieve’ (Hine, 2000; p48). Whilst Hine herself points out that to ‘lurk’<sup>82</sup> means relinquishing claims to the kind of research authority that comes from exposing the emerging analysis to challenge through interaction (Hine, 2000; p48), she also notes that cyberbased research needs to take into account the ways in which cyberspace inhabitants interact with each other. Within the mixed race sites accessed – where no site-specific ‘log in’ was

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<sup>81</sup> Hine’s focus on sole-authored web-pages demonstrates that, although far from static, web pages produce a different form of interaction between those online than newsgroups and forums, with different temporal and spatial outcomes.

<sup>82</sup> To lurk in cyberspace means to visit newsgroups and forums, etc. without contributing.

required – it was clear that lurking was a common and accepted practice. Many contributors introduced themselves by stating that they had been lurking in the site for some time before feeling ready or moved to post a message. To this end, it was decided that the observation of the field would take the form of ‘lurking’ within those sites.<sup>83</sup> In this way, not only could the discursive analysis applied to various other strands of contemporary mixed race projects as explored in the thesis be maintained but the questions of the research project could be met without leading contributors into exchanges shaped by its needs and interests. In this respect, the debates online have essentially been approached as a ‘collection of texts’, that is, ‘a temporally shifted and packaged form of interaction’ (Hine, 2000; p50) to be read in conjunction with other texts of the ‘second wave’ in order to establish further the discursive strands that constitute contemporary mixed race projects. This is not to negate the interactive nature – and the implications of this – of these texts, which shall be discussed later in the chapter. However, by approaching the Internet textually, the position of the researcher in this instance is clearly defined not as a participant but as an observer or rather ‘reader’ of the interactions taking place online. To this end, the observation took place at sufficient regular intervals (at least weekly over an 18 month period) to monitor adequately the exchanges in the forums and trace the main debates taking place within this period, as well as those taking place previously.<sup>84</sup>

Overall then, the aim of the discursive analysis was to gain an insight into how mixed race was being discussed online by those who defined themselves as mixed race people and in what ways this differed from those who defined themselves as mixed offline. Hine has raised the question, also broached earlier in the chapter, regarding the ‘authenticity’ of cyber-interactions and the difficulty of confirming whether contributors’ online selves correspond with their offline selves. However, the question of whether the contributors here were of the mixed

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<sup>83</sup> Initially, a trial period of ‘participation’ was embarked on, where questions informing contributors of the research project and its interest were posted, inviting discussion. However, due to a combination of lack of responses at times, the frequent invitations to continue the discussions privately through email and the desire not to ‘shape’ the field, the approach was abandoned in favour of ‘lurking’.

<sup>84</sup> The decision to focus on message boards rather than real time chat allowed earlier threads to also be accessed.



backgrounds they stated is itself irrelevant – within cyberbased research it is, as Hine states, not for the researcher ‘to bring some external criterion for judging whether it is safe to believe what informants say, but rather to come to understand how it is that informants judge authenticity’ (Hine. 2000: p49). Thus, in this project, the researcher’s role was not to verify or disprove the authenticity of the contributors but both experience the cyber-interactions on their own terms and to interpret these interactions within the larger framework of the research project as a whole.

### **Mixed Race in Cyberspace – Discussion Spaces**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, even a cursory search for mixed race related topics in cyberspace results in a multitude of accessible websites. In order to fulfil the criteria of the research project and be included as part of the cyber-research field, a sample of sites with active discussion spaces that specifically related to mixed race identity was chosen. The sites were chosen on two main criteria: that the forums were able to be accessed without having to register as a member (i.e. that these forums were more ‘informal’ sites), and that regular and frequent contributions (at least monthly) were made to the sites. The sites, with a brief description and their URL addresses, are listed below:

***Bumblebee: Afro-Asian Forum:*** discussion forum which focuses more on African and Asian relationships than identity, but occasionally has some relevant threads

*<<http://forums.delphiforums.com/bumblebeetoo/messages>>*

***Asian White Discussion Board:*** as with Bumblebee, contributors to this site are more concerned with addressing interracial relationships, but do sometimes address mixed race identity issues in particular.

*<<http://www.asianwhite.org/>>*

***Blasian:*** focuses on African-American and Asian relationships and those of that particular mixed background.

*<<http://go.to/blasian>>*

***Crossing the Divide***: formerly known as Interracial Haven Forum, this site is aimed specifically at those who wish to discuss mixed race identity and relationship issues <<http://forums.delphi.com/irhaven/>>

***The Half Korean Page***: site for those of a mixed Korean heritage with a small message board

<[www.halfkorean.com](http://www.halfkorean.com)>

***Interracial Voice***: a widely accessed site where a myriad of multiracial identity issues are discussed seriously and bluntly on a well-attended forum

<[www.interracialvoice.com](http://www.interracialvoice.com)>

***Mavin***: forum of the online magazine *Mavin* which celebrates the diversity of multiracial identity; mixed race issues are addressed thoughtfully and seriously

<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mavin>>

***Mixed Folks***: site which seems mostly concerned with ‘outing’ famous mixed race people, with a small messageboard/guestbook

<[www.mixedfolks.com](http://www.mixedfolks.com)>

***The Mulatto People***: site devoted to ‘establishing’ a mulatto community and culture, with an intense and vociferous letters forum

<[www.mulatto.cjb.net](http://www.mulatto.cjb.net)>

***The Multiracial Activist Forum and Chat***: forum with a large body of contributors, who cover a wide range of issues related to the ‘multiracial experience’

<[www.forums.delphi.com/multiracial/start](http://www.forums.delphi.com/multiracial/start)>

***My Shoes***: site created by a clinical psychologist for ‘multiracial people of a white appearance’ with a small message board and personal testimonies area

<[www.myshoes.com](http://www.myshoes.com)>

Once the sites were identified, they were monitored as described earlier in the chapter with the following questions in mind: Who is identifying as mixed race in the discussion groups? Is there an agreed sense of what constitutes mixedness? What are the key issues for the contributors and are they the same as those found within the more ‘elite’ discourses of mixedness? Is there a sense of cohesion or belonging around the concept of ‘mixing’, regardless of the ‘mix’ itself? What



are the implications of the formation of these online mixed identities for their mixed offline identities?

Thus, the key aim behind the questions for the cyberbased study was to establish whether the three strands identified in the discourse of the ‘second wave’ were present in cyberspace, the extent to which these were similar, and whether there were any themes or motifs particular to the cyberspace discourse. The next section presents the findings of the cyberbased study.<sup>85</sup>

### **Mixed Race Debates in Cyberspace**

As with the ‘second wave’ discourse, a similar tripartite discourse could be identified within the mixed race debates in cyberspace: legitimacy of mixed identities, connection of mixed identities, and the transcendence of racial identities altogether. However, it was clear over the course of the cyberbased study that despite the similarities in themes within the strands, there were some noticeable differences in the ways in which these were approached and conceptualised online. Whilst the ‘actual’ and ‘ideal’ phased discourses online demonstrated a high level of synchronicity with the ‘second wave’ literature counterparts, it was clear that there were significant discrepancies between ‘elitist’ and cyberspace discussions of the ‘potential’ phase, that is, the connection of all mixed identities. The next section shall examine the synchronicity between the debates regarding the actual and ideal phases before turning to the different focal points found in the potential phase.

#### *Legitimacy and Transcendence*

As with the ‘second wave’ discourse ‘second wave’, discussions of mixedness online also centre heavily around the question of the legitimacy of mixed identity. The key motifs of the ‘second wave’ discourse – anti-pathologisation, recognition and acceptance – are all in evidence here. The overwhelming

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<sup>85</sup> As with all research, the ethics of reporting from the field requires sensitivity. Although access to all the postings on the sites is available to anyone who wishes to log on to the Internet, as permission was not sought directly from contributors, only the site and date have been given and user names have not been provided.

majority of contributors to the online forums express beliefs that are highly in tune with the 'second wave'; that mixedness is not an unnatural, deviant state which leads to confusion:

*I'm of both black and white descent, and I don't feel like I'm "confused" of who I am, so to speak, I do not side with either race, simply because of what is "blackness", "whiteness", it's all just a label anyway, and if anyone is "confused" it would be fullbloods.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 9 Aug 2003

That mixedness needs to be recognised by monoracial society at large:

*Why can't mixed people just say they are mixed? Why must they succumb to society's labeling of either being black or white? If you were born of parents of different races, why would you want to be identified with just one parent's racial group? You shouldn't have to be just "black" and you shouldn't have to try to fit in as being just "white" either. Because no matter how much black or white blood you have, multiracial people are still just that: multiracial.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 10 Aug 1999

And that it needs to be accepted as a legitimate racial and/or ethnic identity

*I know who I am. It is society that can not accept the mixed child as being mixed. When you are a part of two races you should not be able to identify totally with one and not the other.*

Posted to *Mavin*, 8 Jun 1999

Where any difference resonates in the expression of these beliefs regarding mixed race legitimacy is in the way in which they are articulated in the cyber-discourse. Online, debates around legitimacy are expressed in forms which might collectively be labelled as 'positive frustration', where the highly charged sense of frustration experienced by contributors regarding the questioning or challenging of their racial and ethnic identities by 'monoracials' is channelled into creative and positive conceptualisations of 'mixedness'. This is to say that whilst all the 'legitimacy' motifs of the 'second wave' discourse are clearly identifiable online, in cyberspace there is both a much greater degree of anger and frustration expressed towards the monoracial bias of society (all monoracial backgrounds, not only white, are constantly accused of prejudice) as well as a



more creatively inventive outlet for dealing with this (the creation of 'online communities'<sup>86</sup> to celebrate specific mixes as well as mixedness in general).

In many senses, it is clear that the informality of cyberspace has contributed to the formation of this discourse – the specifically prescribed areas in which to discuss mixedness and the relative anonymity with which it is possible to do so allow both positive and negative unrestrained expression of thought and feeling about what mixedness means for individual contributors. Although such expressions are evident in the discourse of academia and activists, it tends to be more formal and selective. Indeed, on the first few readings of the message boards, what was most striking were the high levels of honesty on the part of online contributors:

*Ever since i've found this site i'm struggling to answer the question: has my experience as a biracial person been completely negative? i don't think so..but it is hard to try and remember what GOOD i have experienced b/c of my cultural situation. (other than the typical oh i'm so glad to have both perspectives and i'm so open etc.)*  
Posted to *The Half Korean Page*, 7 April 2003

The relatively high incidence of debates in which contributors to the sites comment on feelings of unhappiness with regards to their racial identity without necessarily expressing a positive resolution is extremely interesting, as are the reactions to these postings. Whilst it might be over-reaching to suggest that there is a 'taboo' around seeing the mixed race experience as anything other than positive, it is certainly a subject that causes a sense of unease amongst contributors. Though it is acceptable for one to have felt negatively in the past about being mixed, it is not quite the done thing to feel negatively without an impending sense of resolution.

*Boo Hoo. As I read through some of these responses I became a little pissed off. Not that I am not sympathetic to the pain, because I am. But the constant whining about, "I don't fit in," is very disappointing. Children of the Rainbow, listen up. We are here for a reason and believe me, it is not to "fit in." Each of us is walking, living, breathing,*

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<sup>86</sup> 'Online community' is used here to refer to the online interactions around web pages and their forums. The concept of a mixed race community as arising through Internet usage will be discussed later in the chapter.

*laughing proof that all "colors" of people can mix harmoniously, denying or detracting from no one.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 6 Sep 1997

*I am overjoyed beyond human comprehension over finally having a place to speak my mind on this topic. I am, however, disappointed by the number of mixed-race people who seem to spend so much time feeling sorry for themselves. So many mixed people seem to look at their racial background as a curse, their light skin and straight hair as some kind of ugly deformality or scar. I don't think this way. Though I did spend much of my life thinking of myself as an abnormality, an oddity, my perspective has changed as I grew older.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice* 13 Jan 1998

Such expressions are not surprising considering the overwhelming level of stigmatisation traditionally levelled at mixed race people and, consequently, the desire to suppress any negative attitudes towards mixedness – even that coming from other mixed individuals – is understandable. Though other contributors tend to be supportive of the feelings expressed in such postings, they firmly take the view that these feelings are the fault of society's prejudice toward mixed race people rather than indicative of innate identity problems stemming from the state of mixedness overall. In this respect, the anti-pathologisation motif – as in the 'second wave' literature – is a fundamental tenet of the cyber-discourse and, consequently, a great sense of pride in being mixed is a frequent theme in the postings. Many contributors comment on how they feel their backgrounds, even if difficult, have proved personally enriching. Sentiments which express how an originally negative attitude was replaced by a positive attitude to mixedness are the norm in cyberspace.

*My experience as mixed in the UK has been one of alienation and also fierce pride in my mixed identity, also of huge relief when meeting others who will actually talk about it!*

Posted to *Mavin*, 29 March 2001

Indeed, one of the more popular forms of interchange for mixed race contributors online is situated around the sense of frustration felt in being relentlessly forced to validate themselves to others. The constant pressure to explain one's self in 'acceptable' terms is frequently described in the forums. How, it is wondered, is it possible to define oneself outside the family – where all the 'mix' is generally



known – in a way which will be both understood and acknowledged as legitimate.

*I am Black, White, Cherokee, Taino (Caribbean Indian), Hispanic and my wife is White, Hispanic and European (Spanish) and that's just the Racial Specs. Religions in our families and ancestors include, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Moslem, Spiritualist. And politics is a wide range as well. Now...define my 3 kids. Imagine the torment when we are faced with the Race question on a questionnaire and it says "Choose only 1". So, do I ignore my fathers roots? White and Cherokee? My Mom's Hispanic, Indian, White and Black? Or my wife's family?*

Posted to *The Multiracial Activist*, 14 May 2003

From this analysis of the sites, it becomes evident that there is a great deal of frustration levelled at the inadequate social structures in place to cope with people who are seen to inhabit the in-between or third spaces of the binary oppositions of white and other. Indeed, every mixed race or multiracial site concerned with identity seems born from a single question: ‘What are you?’ It runs through the messages, debates and discussions as a unifying thread, regardless of the ‘mix’ involved. It is unanimously dreaded and despised, but appears to lie at the very heart of mixed race identity itself, as people struggle to answer it in a way which satisfies both themselves and those around them.

*After 31 years of ‘What are you?’ you get a bit defensive! [...] saying ‘biracial’ isn’t good enough for most people. They want to know the whole bizarre set of circumstances that resulted in me. I feel that it is an invasion of my privacy, but I still don’t know how to respond without sounding unpleasant or making it a big deal.*

Posted to *My Shoes*, 30 Aug 2000

How to identify satisfactorily poses a particular problem, setting up a tension between the individual’s ideas of racial identification and those of the surrounding society. Time and time again, debate in the forums reveals how the ‘labels’ proffered by the contributors are often ignored or rejected by those around them.

*I am half Japanese and half Caucasian [...] I work in a job where I meet a lot of people and it’s every other day that someone asks me “What are you?” Don’t you get tired of that [...] Sometimes when I*

*tell people my racial heritage they still say, "Yeah but you're really White," I guess they didn't hear me.*  
Posted to *My Shoes*, date unknown

Whilst the frustration of contributors towards this constant questioning of their identities is evident, many have channelled it into a positive and creative force. Online, it would seem that far from ushering people of mixed race into 'either or' boxes, the rigid racial boundaries and demands of society have compelled many mixed race people to create new labels and monikers for themselves. What might be called 'Tiger Woods syndrome' can be found throughout the forums, as people invent and experiment with racial terminology.<sup>87</sup> Terms such as Blasian (black and Asian), Blackanese (Black and Japanese), Blatina(o) (Black/Latin American), Blaxian (Black and Mexican), and Halvsie (half-Japanese), amongst others, are prolific in cyberspace, although interestingly do not seem to be in much use 'in real life', unlike the term 'hapa' which is being used more and more by multiracials in both spaces.

However, whilst mixedness is clearly being celebrated online, is it also evident that it is not as easy to do so 'in real life'. The problematic issue of wanting to identify with a 'legitimate' racial group yet being part of a group that is not always recognised as such, leads many mixed race people in the forums into discursive territory that can be described as 'passing'. However, the form of passing that is discussed in cyberspace differs significantly from the traditional forms of passing as discussed in chapter 2. Rather than operating in terms of denying the minority side of one's heritage by letting people assume one's whiteness, 'passing' online is generally used to describe the discourse which surrounds the idea of identifying primarily as minority group 'monoracial'. In a thread headed, 'Is it okay to identify with your European ancestry?' in the Interracial Voice forum, the question of publicly recognising the 'whiteness' of a mixed heritage is directly addressed, with many contributors arguing that not to do so would be denying 'a part of oneself'. Repeated in various guises in other forum debates, it would seem that the notion of passing has undergone an

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<sup>87</sup> As will be recalled from chapter 3, Tiger Woods has been adopted as something of a figurehead of the Multiracial Movement after 'outing' himself as 'Cablinasian' (to identify with all parts of his heritage) rather than adopting the 'African-American' label usually given to him.



interesting reworking so that, for many mixed race people, it is the white, rather than the minority, heritage that is under pressure to be denied. From what is reported on these sites, it would appear that the traditional view that minority groups are more open to accepting those of mixed race identities is highly debatable. Black communities in particular are greatly attacked by many mixed race people for perpetuating the ‘hypodescent’ rule: that one drop of black ‘blood’ makes you black, even when other minority groups are part of the ‘mix’:

*...in any case, the black side of my family was very unsupportive of the marriage and the children, unless we grasped our blackness in totality [...] We’ve been ostracized for wishing to pursue our Korean culture.*  
Posted to *The Half Korean Page*, 18 Jan 2001

*I am half asian and half black as well. I think it would be wrong to deny or not even claim the other half of me. whenever someone asks what race I am , I tell them asian & black. I figure if I looked only black, they wouldn’t ask in the first place. A lot of blacks say that I am “selling out” because I say I am both. You wouldn’t believe the hard time I had in school about this. I just think it would be wrong not to acknowledge my mother.*  
Posted to *Crossing the Divide*, 14 April 1999

Unlike in the ‘second wave’ literature, a high degree of prejudice towards mixed race people from minority groups is reported online, concerning discriminatory attitudes and attacks on mixed race people by minority monoracials.<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, it is worth noting that although many of the contributors who stated they were from outside of the USA also acknowledged they had experienced some hostility from minority monoracial groups, they often stressed that ‘mixedness’ is less of an issue in their own countries:

*How sad to see the race/colour conflicts that grip America [...] In Britain dating out of your race is no big deal, it's actually the norm and mixed race peoples are recognised as a group without any argument. I think black americans should move on and let each individual decide for themselves.*  
Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 21 Jun 2002

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<sup>88</sup> *half-breed, zebra, whitey, house nigger, ainoko* (Japanese), *tee-gi* (Korean) are some of the racial slurs reported throughout the sites.

Although it was not always possible to tell where contributors were from – although, generally, the majority appeared to be from the USA – as indicated, there was a tangible sense that antagonism from minority monoracial groups was an issue that, if not particular to the USA, was more pronounced. In light of the UK and US synthesis of the ‘second wave’, this is an important finding and one which shall be returned to in detail in the following chapters.

Returning to the cyberdiscussions, another interesting finding was that with a sizeable number of contributions coming from those who have mixed ‘minority + minority’ as opposed to mixed ‘White + minority’ backgrounds, there is a growing challenge to traditional concepts of mixedness which is not so evident in the ‘second wave’ literature. This challenge is one which also concomitantly contests ‘blackness’ as a dominant minority identity:

*IMHO [in my humble opinion] I STRONGLY believe that more mixies who don't claim or don't have ANY "black" ancestry white/indian, white/asian, and white/asian/indian must become public speakers for the MM [Multiracial Movement] and be more vocal against the black and mixies who promote "one drop" myth. Because they're not vulnerable to blacks venomous demands and "white" opponents will be unable to dismiss it as a "black" problem*  
Posted to Mavin, 25 May 1999

It is evident that through the concept of ‘passing’ as a monoracial minority member, many contributors struggle with the collision between race, culture, ethnicity and nationality that surrounds them:

*But is culture defined by RACE? I mean if a white kid grew up in a all Asian town would he be Asian or white? I mean if he had never seen or spoken to a non Asian and if he only knew and spoke that language, would he be more or less Asian (speaking of culture) then an Asian here in the USA living in Montana?*  
Posted to Asian-White Relations, 18 April 2001

The discrepancy between what one appears to be and what one identifies as is central to many contributors’ experiences. The idea that some kind of racial authenticity exists has had a significant effect on many of the contributors. Although many speak of claiming a monoracial identity occasionally or in the past, they admit to never truly identifying as such, either as a result of their own



feelings or of outside questioning – and the two are closely related. The subject of whether it is possible to be too black/Asian/Native American for some but not enough for others is a recurring theme.

*As far as my "race", I've had all kinds of stupid things said to me, the main one being "You're not really Black", by both African Americans and by Euro's, either as a compliment or an insult or having people demand that I "choose" one over the other or people insisting that "You are Black if you have one drop of Black Blood". That's a pretty consistant theme!*

Posted to *The Multiracial Activist*, 20 Oct 2003

For many contributors, the difficulty of satisfactorily positioning themselves so that their racial/ethnic identities are readily recognised and accepted is less preferable than transcending race altogether. As with the 'second wave' literature, the uselessness of racial categories is a constant theme in online forums:

*Instead of adding Multi-Racial categories or allowing multiple check offs on the Census, why not go to the heart of the matter and eliminate the question entirely from the Census and government tracking. The system was put in place originally to discriminate and I fear it is still having that effect.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 17 Aug 1997

Unlike the 'second wave' literature, such statements are not as heavily countered by admittances that the transcendence of race as a theoretical position is in an 'ideal' stage of achievement. There can be encountered online a small but vocal number of contributors who see the rejection or transcendence of racial categories - the 'racial atheism' of Zack (1993) as almost a political position:

*The next time someone asks me "what are you?" I will force myself to answer Human. If the person does not like that answer, tough... I will not allow myself to join organizations created specifically for one race unless it is the human race.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 17 July 1998

However, as with the 'second wave' literature, on the whole there tends to be a recognition amongst contributors of the tension between believing in the

redundancy of racial categories as a whole whilst supporting and encouraging a positive ‘mixed race’ identity:

*There should definitely be a multiracial option on the census, perhaps in the form of a direction to check "all that apply." Ideally, this would help eliminate some of the stigma attached to claiming a multiracial heritage--trying to distance oneself from one's black/chinese/jewish/etc parent--and make people aware of how subjective the idea of race is in the first place.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 1 Jun 1996

As we have seen, there is thus a high level of synchronicity between the ‘second wave’ literature and cyberspace discussion discourse on legitimacy and transcendence of mixed racial identities. In many respects, these are constructed along similar themes: the rejection of pathologised mixed race identities, the frustration with being challenged and the resulting struggle to create suitable self-definitions. However, the difference identified in the cyberspace discourse focus on the third mix and monoracial prejudice is further evident in the continuation of these topics within what was identified in chapter 2 as the ‘potential’ phase of the ‘second wave’ discourse – the connection of all mixed identities . Within this discursive strand, there appears to be a significant divergence between the way in which ‘mixedness’ works on a group, rather than an individual level, in the form of whether there exists such a thing as a ‘mixed race community’ and, if so, who the members of this community are.

### **The Mixed Race Community?**

As initially illustrated in chapter 3, within the ‘second wave’ literature, a thread on the potential creation and establishment of a mixed race community can be identified. Whilst Ifekwunigwe’s investigation of the potential development of a global connection of mixedness or ‘métisse’ identity makes her the most vocal on this subject, (Ifekwunigwe, 1999), others have also attempted to grapple seriously with the issue (Zack, 1993; Daniel, 2002). For the most part, however, the subject in the ‘second wave’ literature takes the form of questions rather than a developed theoretical concept, with a significant body of reservations expressed regarding the actuality of a mixed race community ever coming into



existence. Several have questioned whether the experience of what Daniel calls ‘liminality’ can be a valid unifying characteristic of a community, that is, whether being mixed in and of itself warrants separate and collective recognition when perhaps the only commonality mixed race people have with each other is a sense of difference from the mainstream (Williams, 1996; Daniel 2002).

In cyberspace, however, the very obstacles that hinder the academic development and acceptance of a mixed race community – the failure of shared experience alone to constitute a legitimate defining trait for group formation – is the very factor around which a sense of community appears to be forming. The growing number of people who find a significant number of others online who share their experiences of positive frustration and are developing an identity around this becomes clear from even a cursory reading of the sites. Certainly, in cyberspace discussions, it seems that the idea of the existence of a mixed race community is taken much more for granted. The following post is indicative of the way in which the sense of community is being used in cyberspace:

*When monoracial communities act in a way that is harmful to the multiracial community, and particularly when it is high-handed and unresponsive to dialogue, they are being MONORACIST (my term). That is, they are being racist, and racist specifically in a way that harms the multiracial community.*  
Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 5 Feb 1997

Thus, whilst the notion of a mixed race community is vaunted as being at a potential stage within academic discourse, online there is a distinct tendency to engage with it as a social reality. References to the mixed race community are frequently made in such a way that assumes the existence of such a community and discusses its needs and interests in relation to other racial and ethnic communities. Consequently, rather than questioning the legitimacy of the concept of a mixed race community, debates related to this topic tend to centre on the ‘membership’ of the community itself.

As discussed earlier, the concept of shared experience of mixedness has already been identified both on and offline as a unifying factor for mixed race people. From the online discussions, the frequent occurrence of the ‘What are you?’ question in particular appears to create a sense of unity that forms the backbone

of the mixed race community. The uncomfortable and even hostile feelings of many mixed race people towards these encounters are well known. What is less well documented, however, is the complex way in which the perceived ambiguity of mixed race people which provokes the question seems itself to be crystallising into the core around which their racialised sense of self is developing. To be precise, from the direction which much of the cyberspace debates seem to be taking, it appears as if physical ambiguity is very much becoming a prerequisite for admittance to the idea of a mixed race community.

*YACTNOW [user name], the woman is white. I don't know about you, but this woman sure as hell isn't more mulatto than I am. Any "problems" she may have experienced because of "race" was brought upon by herself for identifying as black. You seem to be trying to take away the mulatto identification from REAL mulattoes with this story, or trying to make it so generic, that we do not have something that is our own. Why? I thought you on the mulattos' side.*

Posted to Interracial Voice, 09 Jul 2000

Emerging from cyberspace, where the lack of visual signifiers would suggest that physicality would be less important, the focus on a 'mixed' appearance as a means of gaining membership to the mixed race community seems particularly incongruous at first. Yet, when considering that many contributors are drawn to enter these sites due to the questioning of their physical ambiguity 'in real life', it is not so surprising that the subject has become a significant discussion topic. What is surprising, however, is the way in which this discussion often takes place in terms of the degree and content of the mixedness displayed by contributors.

The idea of a 'hierarchy' of mixedness – where a certain idea of what mixedness should look like and subsequently the ranking of some 'mixes' over others – is hardly covered in the academic literature, although it can be discerned to some extent in the raising of certain themes. Daniel (2002) for example makes a distinction between 'first-generation' mixed race individuals (who have parents socially and self-designated as black and white) and 'multigenerational' mixed race individuals (who have been viewed as black by society or have parents or generations of ancestors of mixed backgrounds). Others, as discussed previously,



have questioned the domination of the discourse by black/white mixes (Mengel, 2001) as well as the point when mixed race stops being mixed race (Hall, 1996). However, for the most part, the emphasis on the academic literature is on inclusion – in the discourse of the ‘second wave’ as a whole the statement that ‘we are all mixed race’ is a common one. Yet in cyberspace, the development of an exclusionary concept of mixedness can be seen to run alongside the idea of ‘sameness’ or racial transcendence, as the concept of ‘real’ mixed v. ‘pseudo’ mixed emerges in debates. It is not unusual to see heated debates, even flame wars<sup>89</sup> developing over whether someone is a ‘real’ or ‘pseudo’ ‘mixie’.

*Sherrie [...] You're obviously not Interracial, coming from one myself  
[...] You have Native American in you, I don't know how much, but  
would it be enough to influence you to be confused [...] I personally am  
not confused and have parents from different racial backgrounds.  
Posted to Interracial Voice, Wed 5 April 2000*

On many of these sites, contributors frequently defend or challenge the authenticity of their and other people's mixedness by referring to the ‘racial fractions’ of one's background and presence (or lack of) ‘mixed’ physical attributes, for example, the texture of their hair, the tones of their skin or the shape of their eyes. Paradoxically, whilst mixed race individuals have long experienced and fought against an exaggerated emphasis on ‘fractionalisation’ or physical appearance, online there is a sense that we are beginning to see elements of this infuse the construction of mixed race as it is produced by mixed race individuals themselves. There is then a sense that a ‘hierarchy’ of mixedness is beginning to emerge in cyberspace, that is, a rationale which dictates that whilst all mixed race people belong to the mixed community, some are more ‘mixed’ than others.

*Recently, I saw Mariah Carey on Oprah talking about growing up  
multiracial. She mentioned that it seems like people have a problem  
dealing with interracial issues when it comes to black and white. If a  
person is Asian and white, they are more or less, allowed to say they are  
such. Not that they don't have problems because everyone who is mixed  
has to deal with something, but if a person is mulatto, it seems to be a  
deeper issue with people and the mulattoes themselves.*

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<sup>89</sup> An acrimonious dispute, conducted in a cyberspace forum.

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 28 Nov 1999

*How does living between the races affect me? Sometimes life seems like one long, dreary, miserable nightmare. I'm not accepted by either "race", or even by the mixed-race community as I don't fit their criteria either. You people are lucky, as at least you have a mixed identity. . I feel as though I have nothing. To "whites" I'm just another Paki or non-white because as far as a lot of them are concerned there's no difference between "coloured" people of any description, to the Indians I'm just another white, ignorant of their culture, not speaking their language, not sharing their religion, etc.*

Posted to *Interracial Voice*, 23 May 2000

From such strands in online discussions, it would appear that those of white and black backgrounds are at the top of this hierarchy, followed by those identified as 'hapa', with the 'other/other mixes occupying the lowest tier. Interestingly, this hierarchy is similar in form to that of the traditional framework of the 'first wave' where, as discussed in chapter 3, white and black mixing traditionally came to be seen as both the most common and the least desirable. In the cyberspace hierarchy, the traditional framework has been subverted so that, whilst white and black is still seen as the most common mix, it is also the most 'authentic' – the shared mixed race experience is often taken to mean that of white and black and the further removed from this experience, the greater the chance of an accompanying inference that the mixed experience is less 'authentic'. Indeed, the growing preponderance of sites which cater specifically for certain mixes can also be seen as a reflection of the hierarchy that is emerging in cyberspace. With the majority of the sites and forums which are open to mixed race people in general dominated by discussions and references particular to white and black mixes, cyberspace has seen a gradual fragmentation of sites into more and more precise mixes, such as The Half-Korean Page, etc.<sup>90</sup> Although there is much discussion on the general mixed race experience in these sites, there are also more specific debates on the experiences particular to these mixes. The website 'My Shoes', for instance, is specifically for 'mixed people with a white appearance', and has arisen as a result of problems that some self-identified mixed race people experience in having their mixedness accepted

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<sup>90</sup> Since the ethnographic study ended, many other 'mixed race sites' have been created. See 'InterRace Cruise' for a full list. <[www.ircruise.com/links](http://www.ircruise.com/links)>



*Most people don't even consider me to be biracial because they think of Asian Indians as white. I don't see my Asian ancestry as something to escape but as something to celebrate. Once, I tried to explain to my cousin that I wasn't white. This was something she just didn't understand. She responded by saying, "No, you're white because you look white"*

Posted to *My Shoes*, 24 December 1998

There is then a noticeable tension within the dialogue in cyberspace relating to the mixed race community. On the one hand, there is an assumption that such a community does exist for all those of mixed racial backgrounds whilst, on the other, there is a sense that not all mixed backgrounds are authentic enough to belong. As with the 'second wave' literature, these debates indicate a fundamental conflict between the right demanded by mixed race people to self-identify and their desire to belong to an established and accepted 'racial' group which acknowledges their mixedness. What is particularly interesting in the cyberspace discussions is the way in which, unlike in the 'second wave' literature, the potentiality of mixedness to form a group identity is largely taken for granted.

The validity of the notion of community as it applies to the social interactions occurring online is much debated amongst researchers of the Internet (Rheingold, 2000; pp323-391). Whilst some studies of the Internet argue that the existence of 'online communities' require us to rethink the notion of 'community', in terms of viewing community to mean 'shared practices' instead of or as well of physical boundaries (Hine, 2000), others argue that the ability to 'log off', that is, the lack of sustained responsibility and commitment which accompanies participation in 'online communities', means that online interactions can not be considered communities. As important as these debates are, as Hine points out, the tendency of both advocates and critics to assess the legitimacy of the notion of online communities in relation to their real counterparts, not only often 'harks back to a romanticized view of traditional communities' (Hine, 2000; p19) but also often distracts from the relationship between the online and the offline. If, as stated earlier in this chapter, it is agreed that an approach to Internet-based research must take account of the Internet as culture and cultural artefact, what are we to

make of the concept of a mixed race community, as encountered by this cyberbased research, online?

In one respect, the existence of the concept of a mixed race community in cyberspace may be understood as a direct consequence of the technology of the Internet itself, that is, as a cultural artefact. There is no doubt that, in cyberspace, a series of mixed race ‘communities’ exist, in the form of the types of interactive websites described earlier, where people of mixed race backgrounds actively meet to discuss and share their experiences of mixedness. In many ways, cyberspace itself is the ultimate ‘imagined community’ in the sense that it does not even have the pretence of the spatial roots that are often held to shape notions of community in the real world (Holmes, 1997). Indeed the technology of the Internet, which enables people to come together from disparate locations ‘in real life’, has undoubtedly facilitated the formation of a virtual community for disparate numbers of mixed race people, as it has done for other groups of people with shared interests, from new mothers to devotees of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, as well as facilitating connections between previously defined diasporic communities.<sup>91</sup>

It is clear that ‘online communities’ are a distinct form of social interaction for many people, and that a virtual mixed race community not only exists but is heavily and vociferously active. However, in line with the key tenets for cyberspace research outlined earlier, the question that needs to be asked here is not whether the online mixed community is a ‘real’ community – in the ‘traditional’ sense, whatever that might be – but what the implications of it are for conceptualisations of mixed race within contemporary mixed race projects. As discussed earlier, the technology of the Internet is obviously facilitating forms of discussions on mixedness that are absent within the ‘second wave’ literature, such as the extent of monoracial prejudice, the hierarchy of mixedness and membership of the mixed community. However, just as it isn’t possible to log on and shrug off a lifetime of experiencing the world from specific identity-related perspectives (Nakamura et al. 2000, p4), it is necessary to be aware that those perspectives formed online may also have an impact back in the real world.

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<sup>91</sup> See Adams and Ghose (2003).



Indeed, whilst the aim of the cyberstudy was to assess the nature on the online discourse, it nevertheless became clear in the course of the study that not only were mixed race people bringing their real life experiences to cyberspace but that the cyber-discourse that is forming around mixedness also has an impact on conceptualisations of mixedness 'in real life'. At a recent conference on the Mixed Race Experience in the United States,<sup>92</sup> there were tangible signs of the effects of the interaction between notions of mixedness on and offline could begun to be seen. During the course of the conference, the term 'multiracial' community was used frequently and, for the most part, unquestioningly when talking not only about the goals, interests and aims of mixed race people but also when describing their commonality as a whole. There was also at times a slight but perceptible sense of division between different mixes, expressed in attendance and comments made at workshops, many of which were designed around topics relevant to certain 'mixes'.<sup>93</sup> It was also clear from group and individual conversations that many of the mixed race participants at the conference expressed knowledge of some of the mixed race sites studied in this project or, if unaware, were leaving the conference with the intention of 'logging on'. What was particularly interesting about the conference was the extent to which many of the participants – who were mainly college students – were involved in or were intending to set up 'multiracial chapters' at their universities, that is, campus based organisations where mixed race people could come together to share their experiences. For example, the UCLA Hapa Issues club, which sprung out of HIF<sup>94</sup> and is in its '11<sup>th</sup> year of activism' is described as being 'largely involved in building a community for itself'<sup>95</sup> as a source of legitimacy for the group. Such aims also appear to form the heart of other multiracial chapters, including those off-campus organisations such as Swirl, which 'aims to unite the mixed community by providing support to mixed

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<sup>92</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Pan-Collegiate Conference of the Mixed Race Experience, Cornell University, 12<sup>th</sup> –14<sup>th</sup> April, 2002.

<sup>93</sup> For example, the workshops entitled 'Half-white vs. minority mixes'; 'Becoming Hapa'.

<sup>94</sup> Hapa Issues Forum is a non-profit organisation that 'is dedicated to enriching the lives of Asian Pacific Islanders of mixed heritage and developing communities that value diversity'. It has its own web page with a email list discussion forum.

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/hapa/paper.html>

families, mixed individuals, transracial adoptees, and inter-racial cultural couples'.<sup>96</sup> As all of these chapters appear to use the Internet as their primary source of communication – in the form of websites, emails and bulletin boards, there appears to be a strong correlation between the use of the Internet and the emerging offline concept of a mixed community. Indeed, whilst this project focused primarily on discussion forums, it was clear that there are a growing number of what might be called 'multiracial activist sites' which, particularly post the 2000 Census are increasingly celebrating the idea of a mixed race community. Consequently, although the concept of community appears to be given little attention or credence amongst academic circles, the increasing number of 'logged on' multiracial activists, many of whom are emerging through the college chapters, suggests that the question of a mixed race community will take more of a front stage position in future debates on mixedness.

The racially political implications of a 'mixed community' will be considered in more detail in the next chapter – to conclude this one, let us briefly summarise the findings of the cyberstudy. There are three key findings that have emerged from the study. The first is that many of the key issues for online mixed race contributors are the same for those in the 'second wave' literature. As with the 'second wave' literature, a similar tripartite debate could be identified around the legitimacy of mixedness, the connection of all mixed identities and the transcendence of racial categorisation as a whole. However, whilst the key issues of the 'actual' and 'ideal' stages of the debate – legitimacy and transcendence – were very similar in cyberspace as they were in the 'second wave' literature, the 'potential' stage was markedly different. The second key finding of the cyberstudy is that, emerging heavily from the dissatisfaction with (particularly minority ethnic) monoracial prejudice towards mixed race people, a strong sense of a multiracial community exists online, one which appears to be stronger for contributors than simply the idea of an 'online community'. Within this idea of community is a tension over the definition of who is mixed – on the one hand, it is argued that the shared experience of mixedness is enough and that we are all,

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<sup>96</sup> <http://www.swirlinc.org/>



by and large, mixed. race, whilst on the other there is a splintering of mixedness into different categories, which occupy different rungs on the ladder of mixedness. With the recognition of how these online ideas are beginning to take hold in some offline quarters, the final key finding is the recognition of the critical and important role of the Internet in shaping current and future conceptualisations of mixedness. With the online and offline notions of what it means to be mixed race identified as increasingly operating in conjunction with each other, it is clear that cyberspace is very much tied to academia and the Multiracial Movement. The question of how to access those voices that remain firmly outside of this domain, that is, from different socio-economic, geographic and educational backgrounds, is one of the key questions for mixed race studies.

Whilst it is only possible in this work to raise this as a question rather than provide any concrete answers, there are other important points on which it is possible to take a position on. From the findings of this research project so far, it is clear that not only are there tensions within conceptualisations of mixedness as emerging from mixed race debates but that there are tensions between these conceptualisations and those of 'monoraciality'. Is the notion of a mixed race community unifying or divisive for minority ethnic politics? Are minority groups as hostile and opposed to mixed race identity as these sites suggest? If so, what are the reasons for and the implications of this? The next chapter will thus explore the place of mixed race projects within larger racial projects by asking both what the implications of a 'mixed race community' are for the racial formation processes of the UK and USA.

## Chapter 6:

### The Politics of Mixed Race

*Cape Town U.S.A?*  
(Jones, 1994; p58)

*Britain's first black newspaper, The Voice – recently taken over by the Jamaican-based Gleaner group – intends to broaden its readership by appealing to mixed race people. 'We recognise that is the fastest growing youth group,' managing director Colin Reid told The Observer*  
*The Observer*, 11 July 2004

#### Introduction

In its exploration of how the framework of mixedness is perceived and constructed in the UK and USA, the preceding chapters have focused on both historical understandings of what it means to be mixed race and the ways in which contemporary conceptualisations have developed. Whilst chapter 2 presented a model of how mixed race projects have traditionally been constructed in the two countries – through the representation of marginality, the articulation of purity and impurity and the hegemony of white family privilege – chapters 3-5 examined contemporary reactions to the traditional 'first wave' through the personal, political and institutional dynamics of the 'second wave'. However, with all racial projects in a constant process of negotiation with the socio-political needs of the ruling order, the patterns of creation, habitation, transformation and destruction of elements of each project will inevitably have implications for others, as well as for the ruling order itself (Omi and Winant, 1994). Consequently, if a fuller understanding of mixedness is to be achieved, an analysis of mixed race projects must not only look at debates within the mixed race projects themselves, but must also consider how they are influencing – and are influenced by – other existing racial projects. The focus of this chapter, then, is on what might be called the 'politics of mixed race', in that it examines the place of mixedness in the racial formation processes of the UK and USA.



As discussed in previous chapters, much of the discourse of the 'second wave' and the Multiracial Movement in particular focuses on the question of individual rights. These discussions of rights not only take place in terms of 'accurate' representation within racial and ethnic monitoring, but as Tessman points out, they often draw upon the detrimental effects that this lack of accurate representation has on the self-concept, self-esteem and development of mixed race people, particularly children (Tessman, 1999; p276). Whilst Tessman acknowledges that many people place great importance on the effect the racialising of identity has on their psychological health, she also suggests that many other people do not 'lament their lack of access to "a secure racial existence"' and may prioritise other issues in the racial state over their psychological well-being (Tessman, 1999; p278). Moreover, she notes that much of the literature emerging from the 'second wave', and the Multiracial Movement in particular, implies that mixed race (or related terms) is so obviously the correct racial designation that any consideration of whether there is a politics to racial self-identification beyond 'fitting it' is noticeably absent. In its similarity to the points made by Christian (2000) and Small (2001) regarding the 'individual' focus of much of the debates of the MRM, Tessman's critique is very much located within the 'third wave' of understanding mixedness, in the way in which it tries to make sense of mixedness outside the 'mixed race network'. Indeed, the key issue that Tessman raises regarding contemporary mixed race projects is a critical one for making sense of mixedness within the process of racial formation of the UK and the USA. For Tessman, there is a need to explore beyond the question of the *right* to identify as mixed and to ask instead 'what might be the meaning of the various choices that could be made *given* that right' (Tessman, 1999; p278).

Tessman's question is thus in tune with the structure of the analytical framework within which this thesis explores mixedness. Adopting her key issue as the critical next step in this analysis, the focus of this chapter will be on the politics of mixed race, that is, the implications of the choices and rights demanded by the 'second wave' for itself and other racial projects and racial formation processes. In its analysis of the impact of mixedness of the racial arenas of the UK and the

USA, the chapter will consider both the reactions of monoracial groups and the ways in which racial formation processes are being affected by contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness. The following section will first look at the ‘multiracial’ debate in the USA and discuss what reactions the move towards multiracial identification is having amongst both key minority and majority ethnic groups before focusing on the reactions of their counterparts in the UK. The chapter will then conclude by discussing how racial formation processes in the UK and USA are both influencing the direction of mixed racial projects as well as how these projects are themselves shaping racial formation itself.

### **The Multiracial Debate**

As discussed in earlier chapters, there has been an increasing ‘movement’ around mixedness in the USA, not only through the amount of academic literature that is being produced around the identity and experiences of mixed race people, but also through the ‘activism’ of organisations that act as support or political interest groups. In addition to the discursive space the movement has carved out for the legitimacy and recognition of the mixed identities of individuals, there is also a growing sense that these identities may also be united in the form of a ‘mixed race community’. Whilst several commentators adopt a reserved judgement on the actuality of a mixed race community (see chapter 3), it is plain that not only is the concept being upheld by many of those in the Multiracial Movement, but that others outside the movement are beginning to engage with it as a ‘real’ phenomenon – both in terms of its actual existence or potential to exist.

The increasing movement around mixedness in the USA is clearly creating a ‘multiracial debate’, one within which it would appear that the concept – whether actual or potential – of a mixed race, or multiracial, community is beginning to take centre stage. Indeed, whilst this debate began by taking the general form of the ‘individual’ rights of mixed race persons versus the ‘group’ rights of ‘monoracial’ groups, it appears that it is increasingly the question of the ‘group’ rights of mixed race people which is causing consternation in some quarters, particularly amongst African-Americans.



### *The Multiracial Debate and African-Americans*

Unlike past mixed race discourses, contemporary US discourse on 'multiraciality' is distinguished by the presence of voices beyond the hegemonic white voices of the 'first wave'. In addition to the mixed race voice, there can also be noticed a growing public contribution to the discourse from minority 'monoracial' voices, particularly those of monoracial African-Americans.

Historically, the black voice has been obscured within the US discourse on mixedness by the majority of those white voices who defined mixedness as undesirable. In both nineteenth and early twentieth century social scientific and popular discourse on mixedness, references to the attitudes of black Americans were generally made to support the pathological framework of the 'first wave', through claims that those of mixed race were also misplaced amongst and distrusted by black society (Mencke, 1979; Williamson, 1980). Such references continued to be found in later discourses, running concomitantly with the paradoxical belief that the black community was fully accepting of – or rather, should fully accept – mixed race people due to the establishment of the 'one-drop rule' (Williamson, 1980). Outside of these pronouncements, little attention was given to the actual debates and discussions around mixedness taking place amongst black Americans which were, and continue to be, much more complex and significant than is generally recognized.

Whilst the basic intellectual patterns which shaped race and mixed racial thought amongst whites were also influential on black American attitudes (Mencke, 1979; p141), the particular nature of black American racial projects has also had an important influence on the way in which mixedness has been conceptualised in the USA. Although many black Americans did subscribe to the notions that emerged about the distinctiveness of black and white racial traits and instincts, very few accepted the wholesale condemnation of these black traits (Mencke, 1979; p141). The resistance to the conceptualisation of blackness as inferior meant that mixedness was perceived quite differently to the way in which it was conceptualised by white racial projects. Despite the appearance of the tragic mulatto archetype in black American literature, the far more common image of



the mixed race person in this domain was as an educated and responsible person who, forced to suffer the indignities of a racialised caste system, found peace and fulfilment in acting as a 'leader' for the black community (Mencke, 1979). Such representations, particularly post the Civil War, echoed the increasingly integrated position of the 'mulatto elite' into, and as spokespeople for, the black community. This level of integration led to the formation during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of the 'New Negro', the merging of blacks and mulattos into a new cultural and political force (Williamson, 1980). By the time of the civil rights movement, the 'New Negro' was simply a 'Black American', regardless of how much or how little white heritage was also present<sup>97</sup>.

The political legacy of these 'black racial projects' means that, for contemporary black America, those with any 'black heritage' are generally considered 'black':



The popular black authored *The Boondocks*<sup>98</sup> comic strip series, in which the 'black' character Huey constantly challenges the 'biracial' identity adopted by the mixed race character Jazmine and her parents, expresses sentiments that can often be found articulated by black, or black identifying, Americans:

<sup>97</sup> Williamson (1980, p184) cites the example of Julian Bond, who stood for the vice presidential nomination of the party in 1968. According to Williamson, though more than 'half white', no one ever accused him of not being black

<sup>98</sup> *The Boondocks* newspaper cartoon strip by Aaron McGruder appears in more than 250 daily newspapers in the US, as well as others in the Caribbean and South Africa (*The Guardian*, 14 February, 2000). All extracts are from MixedFolks.com <[www.mixedfolks.com/comics.htm](http://www.mixedfolks.com/comics.htm)>





During the course of the Census categorisation debate, many black, or black identifying politicians, public figures and celebrities argued in tune with Afrocentrist critics that blackness requires political solidarity no matter what the actual diversity of one's background (Spencer, 2003; p104). Pronouncements by the singer Lenny Kravitz, who has a white mother and black father, and the Secretary for State Colin Powell, who has acknowledged a 'multiracial ancestry', are indicative of the views expressed:

*You don't have to deny the White side of you if you're mixed. Accept the blessing of having the advantage of two cultures, but understand that you are Black. In this world, if you have one drop of Black blood, you are Black. So get over it.*

Lenny Kravitz, in Spencer, 2003; p104.

*In order not to come up with a very strange word such as Tiger did, I consider myself black American. In America, when you look like me, you're black<sup>99</sup>*

Colin Powell, *Meet The Press*, 1997

<sup>99</sup> Whilst Powell also told the press on another occasion that he 'ain't that black', he qualified this by stating he considered himself 'as black as anybody whose skin could be 20 shades darker than mine. I consider myself an African American, a black man, proud of it.' ('General tries to conquer the world of 'hip' young TV', filed on news.telegraph, 2 September 2002. <www.telegraph.co.uk/news>)



Despite the pronouncements supporting the ‘right’ of individuals to identify as multiracial by organisations such as the NAACP.<sup>100</sup> it was clear that there was a great deal of unease amongst many ‘African-Americans’<sup>101</sup> over the mooted inclusion of a multiracial category. On one level, this unease took the form of fears over the harm that a multiracial Census category could do to African-American ‘rights’. For some, the argument against including a multiracial category or the MATA option were framed in terms of the potential damage of these changes to civil rights monitoring. It was feared that employers and institutions could ambiguously classify anyone they chose under the all-encompassing multiracial category or tabulate the MATA data to disguise any discriminatory practices. Whilst this was clearly a legitimate apprehension, much African-American opposition chose not to frame the main thrust of their debate in this argument and instead concentrated on the ‘numbers’ debate, that is, the fear that allowing multiracial identification – in any form – would lead to an unsupportable loss of African-Americans from the African-American statistical population (Spencer, 2003).

Whilst, as demonstrated in chapter 4, pilot surveys showed that the diminishment of African-American numbers due to the option to identify multiracially were minimal, as was borne out in the results of the actual Census, the prominence and emotive power of this debate suggested that there were other issues at play. Indeed, the statement in 1993 by Arthur Fletcher, the African-American chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, suggests that the problem for many African-Americans is more complicated than a reduction in numbers:

*I can see a whole host of light-skinned Black Americans running for the door the minute they have another choice. And it won't necessarily be because their immediate parents are Black, White or whatever, but all of a sudden they have a way of saying, "I am something other than Black."*

(in Spencer, 2003; p104)

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<sup>100</sup> See chapter 4 for fuller version of the NAACP statement.

<sup>101</sup> The term African-American is used here to distinguish more clearly between the different interest groups in the Census debate and should not be taken as suggesting that ‘African-Americans’ are a different group to ‘multiracial Americans’. Like Colin Powell, many of those who define themselves as ‘African-American’ also recognise their multiracial ancestry and, like Lenny Kravitz, many of those who acknowledge their immediate multiracial heritage identify themselves as ‘African-American’.



Similarly, in his article, 'Racing to leave the Race', written around the same time, Molefi Asante argues that the Multiracial Movement is the result of an 'all-time high' level of hatred amongst some black Americans, who wish to minimise the negativity of their blackness by claiming a multiracial identity (Asante in Spencer, 1997; p32).

As touched on in Fletcher's statement, and echoed in the earlier critiques by Asante and other Afrocentrist critics, underlying the apprehension expressed in the arguments over the diminishment of the African-American community would appear to be an accompanying trepidation about the presence of a 'multiracial community' or the creation of what Jon Michael Spencer (1997) calls 'The New Colored People'. Continuing the scepticism shown by the black-identifying mixed race author Lisa Jones, who asks whether the Multiracial Movement is trying to create 'Cape Town USA' (Jones, 1994; p55), Spencer's critique of the Multiracial Movement focuses on the danger that a multiracial category would pose for race relations in the USA overall. Such a category, argues Spencer, would replicate South Africa's history and produce 'a whole group of mixed-race people being caught betwixt and between two major incompatible social groups and being politically manipulated by the propaganda of the group that is in power' (Spencer, 1997; pp99-100). For Spencer, the history of South Africa indicates that the creation of this mixed race 'median group' would be retrogressive for American race relations, due to the reluctance of this group to relinquish its privileges over a lower-strata group of blacks.

Whilst there are obvious flaws in much of the comparative and speculative nature of Spencer's critique (Azoulay, 1999; Spickard, 2001) his apprehension over the formation of a mixed race group that would be privileged over monoracial black Americans is a distinct component of African-American discourse on mixedness. Despite Spencer's reliance on South African history to underline his and other black American fears, such apprehension has a historical tradition within black American discourse itself in the form of the suspicion of 'mulatto elite'.

As discussed briefly in chapter 2, during slavery there was a recognised 'mulatto elite' in the USA, primarily in the lower South. Born for the most part to

important, rich white fathers and black slave women. these mixed race people were often recognised and sponsored by their fathers. sometimes as free people. Those who were not slaves occupied high social positions almost on a par with their white neighbours and, and, as such, were often valued by white society as an 'intermediate' force to help keep the black slaves 'under control' (Williamson, 1980).

Though the proportion of the mulatto elite in the ante-bellum period was very small, with the majority of mulattos being slaves and suffering the penalties of slavery along with their black brothers and sisters (Mencke, 1979), the elevation of some of those with white heritage into a 'mulatto elite community' that was separate from and unwilling to ally itself with the black community lingers as a sensitive issue. In conjunction with historical attempts by some mixed race people to pass as white,<sup>102</sup> the perceived privileges or opportunities open to those with noticeable white ancestry has produced a residing legacy of suspicion in black American discourse<sup>103</sup> (Streeter, 2003). In *School Daze* (1988), Spike Lee's musical film about black college life, the controversial issue of 'division' based on lightness of skin within the black community, is a main theme. Here, the darker-skinned students (Jig-A-Boo's) clash with their lighter-skinned counterparts (Wanna Be's) over their affiliations, aspirations and positioning in society:

*Wanna Be's: You're just a Jig-A-Boo, tryin' to find somethin' to do!*  
*Jig-A-Boo's: Well, you're a wanna-be, wanna be better than me!*

Whilst Lee's portrayal of black 'caste' divisions in this and other films caused consternation amongst some of the black community, who felt it was inappropriate to air this dirty laundry, others applauded his willingness to tackle this issue.<sup>104</sup> However, although the issue of 'caste' was discussed amongst the black community, it would not be until the Census debates over the inclusion of a

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<sup>102</sup> See Chapters 2 and 5 for discussions of 'passing'.

<sup>103</sup> Post the ante-bellum period, 'Blue Vein Societies' existed in many urban parts of the US - churches, colleges, literary or social clubs where membership was only granted to those of African descent whose skin colouring was light enough to make visible the blueness of one's veins. (Daniel, 1992).

<sup>104</sup> [http://www.galegroup.com/free\\_resources/bhm/bio/lee\\_s.htm](http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/bio/lee_s.htm)



multiracial category that the privileging of some 'black' Americans over others would be brought into mainstream racial debate.

*The 'Multiracial Debate' and White Americans.*

As discussed in earlier chapters, the conceptualisation of mixedness by white Americans has largely operated within a pathological framework which defined mixedness as an abnormal or undesirable state. Whilst, as identified in chapter 2, the patterns of marginality, impurity and purity and white family hegemony continue to exist, the more explicit forms of pathologisation are increasingly being pushed more and more to the margins of the contemporary mainstream US debate on mixedness. Vehement anti-mixed race views that were once articulated in mainstream public discursive spaces such as the media are now increasingly relegated to the outposts of far right literature and websites. As also discussed previously, this has been due largely to the impact of both mixed race and, as just argued, black racial projects which are increasingly influencing the ways in which mixedness is being engaged with. Consequently, it appears that in the process of the negotiation of mixedness within the larger structure of racial formation, two new and distinct 'white voices' can be seen emerging: those of the white parents of mixed race children and those of white Republican politicians, both fighting for or supporting the 'multiracial' recognition of mixed race people.

The voice of white parents in the 'multiracial debate' is becoming increasingly noticeable in America. Whilst there has been a distinct decrease in the number of white authored or researched 'clinical' studies of mixedness over the last decade, those white authors who have written on or researched mixedness tend for the most part to be the parent of a mixed race child.<sup>105</sup> With their conceptualisations of mixedness clearly fixed in the framework of the 'second wave', the voices of these white parents are also gradually beginning to challenge the traditional white voice on mixedness in contemporary American racial formation discourse.

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<sup>105</sup> See for instance James Jacobs, Craig Mason, Paul Spickard (in Root, 1992), Nancy Brown and Francis Wardle (Root, 1996).

Indeed, in addition to their conceptual contributions to the 'second wave', the voices of white parents of mixed race children have featured significantly in the American media over the past decade in the 'activist' arena. Along with prominent mixed race activists such as Ramona Douglass of AMEA and Charles Byrd of Interracial Voice, white members such as Susan Graham, co-founder and executive director of Project RACE and Francis Wardle, executive director of the Center for the Study of Biracial Children, have been extremely active in pushing the multiracial agenda in debates over racial classification in the Census. Graham in particular has been a monumental force in the Multiracial Movement, testifying before the OMB committee on the urgency and validity of introducing a 'multiracial' category on the Census. Like many of the white multiracial activist parents, Graham became involved in the Multiracial Movement after years of frustration with official racial monitoring forms on which there was no space to record the mixed background of her children. Along with AMEA, Project RACE (of which Graham is also a co-founder) is one of the most vociferous campaigners for the rights of the 'multiracial community'.<sup>106</sup>

Whilst the speed with which these and other multiracial organisations mobilised to argue for a multiracial category in the mid-1990s was perhaps surprising to some other racial and ethnic organisations, in actuality many of these organisations had histories stretching back to the late 70s and 80s. Groups such as AMEA, Project Race, I-Pride, The Biracial Family Network (BFN), Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC) emerged during these decades as largely grassroots organisations, with the goals of dispelling stereotypes regarding interracial marriage, providing safe spaces to talk, allowing multiracial children to claim their full identity, and making available a forum for multiracial adults and interracial couples with children to share their experiences (Brown & Douglas, 2003; p111). Whilst these organisations have clearly been of great help and support to numbers of mixed race individuals and their families over the years, the more political bent many of the groups have taken due to the Census debate has led some minority monoracial critics to question their agenda.

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<sup>106</sup> See the website <[www.projectrace.com](http://www.projectrace.com)> for more details.



particularly in terms of the influence and motives of the white parents who were instrumental in the formation of the groups.

Underlying the accusations or apprehension of many critics outlined earlier – that multiracial activists want access to privileges denied to black Americans by creating a ‘new coloured people’ – is an accompanying suspicion that the Multiracial Movement is driven primarily by white parents who want to label their children multiracial in order that they, and their children, may escape the ‘stigma’ of blackness. Though Lisa Jones, who has interviewed Graham and other activists, is sympathetic to some aspects of the Multiracial Movement, she came away highly sceptical of the motives of ‘the white parents of mixed-race bambinos’, wondering whether they were ‘bartering for a safety zone for their café-au-lait kids’ (Jones, 1994; p55). Like Jones, Spencer and other critics of the Multiracial Movement are concerned that the strong presence of white parents in is indicative of a desire, whether conscious or not, to ‘escape the blemish of blackness’ (Jones, 1994; p61). In their accounts of the defence of multiracial identity given by white activists, there certainly appears to be evidence of this charge – Graham is reported by Spencer (1997; p80) as attempting to ‘play down’ the black heritage of her daughter (‘My daughter is not black; my daughter is multiracial’) whilst Jones (1994; p61) spoke to a mother who worried that it would be degrading for her daughter to be attached to categories like black or Hispanic. Mary Waters, the American sociologist, expressed similar doubts over the involvement of parents in the MRM when she testified against the inclusion of a multiracial category at the OMB hearing:

*To the extent that lobbying groups pressing for a multiracial category are composed of interracially married parents who do not want to choose a race for their children, this does not necessarily mean those children will in fact want to report all of those races when they leave home. Parents report more detail on their children’s ancestries than the children do themselves as they age and especially after they leave home. To the extent that the multiracial movement is led by parents who are concerned about having to choose a race for their children, there may not be much of an issue if the children themselves will merely simplify to one race when they leave home. So one question to ponder is whether this movement is a result of parental preferences or whether*

*there are large numbers of people who would like to self-identify as multiracial.*"<sup>107</sup>

Such accusations are strongly refuted by white activists such as Graham who, in response to criticism that she and other white parents would not be so passionate about gaining a multiracial category for their children if they were categorised by society at large as 'white' rather than 'black', said:

*My children and millions like them were classified as "white" by the U. S. Census in 1990 (the Census Bureau took the race of the mother—and about twice as many mothers of multiracial children are white, rather than some other race). So, if "white" was what we wanted, why are we doing this? We already HAVE that!*<sup>108</sup>

However, with the one-drop rule so firmly established, it is clear that whilst a white identity may be applied to mixed race children according to some bureaucratic criteria,<sup>109</sup> it is unlikely to be the case in social situations. One of Graham's children, although labelled white by the 1990 US Census was labelled black by a teacher who 'eyeballed' him and filled in the school monitoring form that Graham had left blank (Spencer, 1997; p23). Graham's push for a multiracial category has thus been to ensure that her children have a consistent racial identity and are not, as she puts it, 'white on the United States Census, black at school and multiracial at home' (in Spencer, 1997; p23).

In their drive to maintain consistency of the real' multiracial identity of their children, Graham and her supporters are at odds with those multiracial activists and theorists who are far more reflective and flexible and about the who, how and why of multiracial identification (Zack, 1993; Thornton 1996). Indeed, for some scholars of mixedness, 'the prominence and actions of white parents such

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<sup>107</sup> Statement of Mary Walters before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology of the House Committee of Government Reform and Oversight Hearing on Multiracial Identification.

<<http://www.projectrace.com/fromthedirector/archive/fromthedirector-032797.php>>

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.projectrace.com/hotnews/archive/hotnews-06un98.php>

<sup>109</sup> In ethnic and racial data collection at the school level, some US states use the race of the father, rather than the mother, as a guideline for identifying the race of the child. Statement of Bernard L. Ungar, Associate Director, Federal Management and Workforce Issues, General Government Division, General Accounting Office Before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight

Hearing on Multiracial Identification, 23 April 1997. <[www.multiracial.com](http://www.multiracial.com)>



as Graham in the multiracial movement have, on occasion, proven to be something of an embarrassment' (Spencer, 2003; p109). Whilst it is difficult to assess to what extent the reports that purport that white parents wish to escape the blemish of blackness for their children may or may not be taken out of context, the courting of certain elements of Republican support by these same parents causes pause for thought. For Rainier Spencer, the willing embrace of backing from this political element by activists such as Graham is 'more than a bit unnerving' (Spencer, 2003; p106). As discussed in chapter 4, strong support for the inclusion of a multiracial category was given by the American political right, particularly from the former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and University of California Regent Ward Connerly, both of whom testified in favour of the category at the OMB hearing.<sup>110</sup> However, as also discussed in previous chapters, analysis of their support suggests quite clearly that it emerged from the anti-affirmative action position of the political right rather than a belief in the 'right to identify' upheld by many multiracial activists. Although the partnership between Graham and her supporters on the one hand and the political right on the other would indicate that the activists are also in favour of abolishing affirmative action, there appears to be no evidence of this beyond the existence of the partnership alone. Rather, it would appear that in their overwhelming desire to destigmatise their relationships and normalise their children (Tessman, 1997), Graham and supporters are naively being manipulated by the political right (Spencer, p107).

Whilst the unreflective alliance of the political right by activists such as Graham has caused significant tension amongst activists and has led to Project RACE being increasingly positioned on the fringes of the movement (Spencer, 2003), Graham and her supporters remain defiant about their involvement with the political right and continue to represent the needs and wishes of the 'multiracial community'. However, as some critics have pointed out, despite their continual emphasis on the needs of this community, there appears to be very little reflection amongst activists such as Graham as to what this community is. Indeed, in many ways, it would seem as if they define it as an extension of what

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<sup>110</sup> See chapter 4 for further details of their testimonies.

the background of their children is – for Graham it is thus a question of seeing multiraciality as state that stems from both black and white but is ultimately something else. Whilst, as we have seen, this polarity of whiteness and blackness has very much framed the discourse on mixedness in the USA, it is not the entire picture. Although it may seem that multiraciality is a story of black and white America, other voices are increasingly gaining their say in the debate on the politics of mixed race.

### *The Multiracial Debate and Minority Americans*

Though a ‘black and white’ dichotomy appears to be the story of American racial formation, what Hollinger (1995) calls the ‘ethno-racial Pentagon’ of white, African-American, Native American, Asian-American and Hispanic is more accurate in describing the key groups whose racial projects work on the racial formation of the USA. Thus, although dominated by the polarised model of ‘black and white’, the multiracial debate in the USA – as discussed in earlier chapters – is also taking place amongst other minority monoracial groups, though it is admittedly much less prominent. This next section will briefly examine some of the debates taking place amongst Asian American, Hispanic and Native American groups.

As with African-American organisations, there was also an intense and often heated debate between factions of these monoracial groups and multiracial activists over the proposed multiracial category, again framed on the surface in terms of monitoring and civil rights:

*Adding a multiracial category would undermine the effectiveness of civil rights enforcement agencies because of the inconsistent counts and the uncertainties it introduces in being able to analyze trends.*

The National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asians and Pacific Islanders (NAPALC) cited in Omi (2003)

*NCLR [National Council of La Raza] does not support the addition of a “multiracial” category [...] Careful consideration must be given to the implications such categories would have on civil rights issues involving equitable representation and affirmative action.*

Raul Yzaguirre, President of NCLR and Sonia Perez, NCLR Poverty Project Director<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Accurate Racial/Ethnic Data Should Drive Category Review’ <[www.prrac.org](http://www.prrac.org)>.



Whilst groups representing the interests of monoracial Asians, Hispanics and Native Americans were united in their opposition discourse of civil rights, each group also demonstrates evidence of a discourse that acknowledges the place of multiraciality within their own communities. Similar to African-Americans, these three minority monoracial groups were aware – although to differing degrees – of the multiracial populations that they harboured within their monoracial communities. The public recognition of Hispanic mixedness by La Raza – ‘Hispanics are a multi-racial population’<sup>112</sup> – but rejection of the need for a multiracial category, was particularly irksome to some activists who argued that this group had themselves ‘adroitly negotiated’ its own space on the Census.<sup>113</sup> However, as Trianosky points out, whilst the reality of Hispanic life is that everyone is *mestizo* – racially or culturally mixed – this does not mean that *mestizaje* is an openly acknowledged reality (Velazco y Trinanosky, 2003: p176). Thus whilst many members of the Hispanic community might acknowledge the historical context of *mestizaje*, they do not necessarily claim a multiracial identity in the way that many activists may wish them – as indeed they wish ‘African-Americans’ – to do so.<sup>114</sup>

Similarly, there is a complex set of attitudes towards mixedness amongst many Native American groups. Indeed, the way in which the Native American mixed race model is conceptualised is quite different to other mixed race models, in that the application of the one-drop rule is more restrictive. In order to be classified as Native American by the Bureau of Indian Affairs – the government agency responsible for regulating federal largesse based on blood quantum – an individual must have an Indian ‘blood quantum’ of at least one-fourth. Both the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the newly emergent ‘Purity Police’ – Native Americans who uphold certain notions of what constitutes ‘Native Americanness’ – support what Baird-Olson (2003; p200) calls ‘the colonizer’s

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<sup>112</sup> *Accurate Racial/Ethnic Data Should Drive Category Review*’ <[www.prrac.org](http://www.prrac.org)>.

<sup>113</sup> Wardle, F. (2003) ‘We Have Only Just Begun’. <[www.webcom.com/~intvoice/wardle4.html](http://www.webcom.com/~intvoice/wardle4.html)>

<sup>114</sup> See discussions in Interracial Voice for calls for the Hispanic community to ‘come out’ as multiracial, as well as for the ‘African-American’ community to acknowledge more publicly its ‘mixed’ heritage <[www.interracialvoice.com](http://www.interracialvoice.com)>. Also Skerry (2000) for further discussion of the politics behind the inclusion of the Hispanic category.

bureaucratic 'identity policy' on who is and isn't Native American. Consequently, unlike the African-American case, one-drop of Native American 'blood' will not necessarily classify an individual as Native American (Ramirez, 1996; p56). However, whilst 'mixed bloods' are often viewed dubiously by 'full bloods' (Wilson, 1992; p123), the growing acknowledgment within the community that more and more Native Americans are of mixed blood – at least 40% according to the 2000 Census (Baird-Olson, 2003) – means that the boundaries may have to be redrawn if the Native American group is to retain its place as a pre-eminent racial project. Thus Native American groups find themselves in a complex position of opposing a multiracial category, whilst encouraging many of those whom are not seen 'socially' as Native American to identify 'officially' as such.

The attitudes of Asian Americans towards the multiracial category and multiraciality in general also share similar patterns to the other minority groups discussed so far, although they too take on their own distinct discursive forms. Perhaps more so than any other of the minority groups, there is a very definite history of the rejection of mixed race people from many Asian American communities, particularly the Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese, who maintained a 'disconnected series of monoracist discourses' before the 1960s, with the result that those of mixed race backgrounds were generally considered outsiders (Valverdere, 1992; Spickard, 2003; p14). However, the growth of American 'Pan-Asianism' in the latter part of the twentieth century as a means to fight discrimination and prejudice, has also apparently led to the increasing inclusion of mixed race Asian Americans into the 'Pan-Asian' and individual Asian communities at large (Spickard, 2003). Whilst the expansion of these communities to include mixed race Asian Americans suggests similarities with the 'New Negro' and 'Black American' movements, there appears to be a significant difference in the attitude of some sections of these communities towards multiracial identities. Unlike black American organisations – which were opposed to the choice to identify multiracially in any form, including the MATA option – some Asian American monoracial minority organisations, such as the Asian American Donor Program and the Japanese American Citizens



League (JACL), the Japanese American equivalent of the NAACP, supported the MATA format.<sup>115</sup> When considering that out of all the minority groups in America, Asian Americans – and Japanese Americans particularly – are the most exogamous,<sup>116</sup> the support of these organisations for the MATA option might seem surprising. Yet it would appear that, contrary to many black Americans who uphold the principle of hypodescent in its traditional form, there are signs that there is a growing recognition amongst many Asian Americans that multiraciality is both a reality and the future for many of their communities (Spickard, 2003), similar to that of the Native American situation. Whilst black Americans have long included those of mixed black parentage in their communities, it has generally been on the premise that they identify as black rather than mixed. What appears to be different in many Asian American groups is the suggestion that those with mixed Asian parentage have more flexibility in terms of identifying as both ‘Asian’ and/or as ‘mixed Asian’. *Amerasia Journal*, one of the leading Asian-American academic journals, devoted an entire issue to exploring the theme of multiraciality in 1997 – the year of the Tiger Woods debate (Spickard, 2003).<sup>117</sup>

However, although mixed race Asian Americans are now increasingly able to assert their multiracial identity and be embraced as part of the Asian American community, it would be over-reaching to say this is the norm. King’s research into the tension over the participation of mixed-race Japanese Americans in Japanese American beauty pageants (King, 2003) – that the women are not ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’ enough to represent Japanese conceptualisations of beauty – demonstrates how mixedness is still an issue in Japanese American society as it is in other Asian American communities. Despite the promise of a

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<sup>115</sup> See Statement of the Third Multiracial Leadership Summit, 7 June 1997

<[www.ameasite.org/classification/mlss6797.asp](http://www.ameasite.org/classification/mlss6797.asp)>

<sup>116</sup> See Williams-Leon and Nakashima (2003), p6.

<sup>117</sup> Despite the frenzy of interest in multiraciality in the black press, few articles have appeared in African-American journals on the subject, let alone entire issues. Most articles that appear on ‘interracialism’ tend to be on the subject of relationships rather than people (Foeman, 1999; St Jean, 1998)

greater flexibility of Asian identity, the legacy of the earlier 'monoracialist' discourses is still clearly present.<sup>118</sup>

Whilst there is then a growing awareness of and expression of attitudes towards multiraciality outside the black and white model, it remains the case that other minority monoracial voices are overshadowed by this. Overall, the debate over multiraciality in the USA has largely consisted of interactions between black Americans, mixed black and white Americans and white Americans. The next section will consider the situation of the UK and discuss the nature of the mixed race debate there. To what extent does the framework of the mixed race debate mirror that of its multiracial counterpart?

### **The Mixed Race Debate**

Whilst there has clearly been a significant debate around multiraciality in the USA amongst minority ethnic and majority ethnic groups, evidence of a similar level of debate in the UK around mixedness is much less apparent. Despite the introduction of the new 'mixed' category, little mainstream or minority media attention has been given to the issue in comparison with the media focus that took place in the USA. Indeed, it would appear that in the area Sollors (2000) calls 'interracialism', there is a much greater focus in the UK on interracial relationships than on mixed race. Whilst there have been a significant number of programmes on this subject on British television in the last few years, and numerous more articles in the mainstream and minority press, those that feature on mixed race people directly are much less numerous<sup>119</sup>. Tracing the mixed race debate in the UK is thus more a question of piecing together those isolated strands on mixedness that do appear in the media and other discursive areas than following the development of the argument between different groups as is possible with the US debate. The following sections shall consequently attempt to identify the main aspects of the UK debate by focusing on the discourse than

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<sup>118</sup> See also Hall and Turner, 2001; Thornton and Gates, 2001.

<sup>119</sup> Programmes on Interracial relationships include *The Colour of Love*, aired on BBC2, 18 August 2003; *Love in Oldham*, aired on Channel 4, 24 September 2001; the only documentary programme specifically on mixed race people is *Brown Britain*, aired 29 September 2001, Channel 4.



can be discerned amongst minority ethnic groups in the UK and the mainstream media at large before analysing the implications of both this and the multiracial debate in the USA.

### *British Minority Monoracial Views*

With the overwhelming majority of work on mixedness in the UK engaging with the field from the perspective of the white dominated ‘first wave’ – either as part of the ‘first wave’ or as a critique of it – the perspectives of minority ethnic groups are little known or are more anecdotal in form (Tizard and Phoenix, 2003). The attempt to gather minority ethnic views in the UK for the purposes of this study encountered several areas of difficulty. Firstly – and contrary to that of the States – there appears to be very little on record from key national or local minority ethnic organisations regarding either the proposed or eventual inclusion of the ‘Mixed’ category on the 2001 Census. Consequently, a ‘third tier’ of fieldwork, which would involve telephone, face-to-face or email/written interviews or to capture the views of these organisations, was built into the original methodology of the thesis. This, it was hoped, would complement the interviews undertaken with key figures in the Census process and the views captured in the cyberbased study to provide an analytical insight into key areas of public discourse on mixedness in the UK. However, out of the numerous organisations contacted, few representatives were willing to participate in the research<sup>120</sup>. The majority did not respond to the invitations to take part, perhaps due to time or other commitments or, more interestingly, due to a lack of opinion on the subject. One respondent from the London Black Women Council replied that although she found the research ‘a complex and interesting area of work’, she did not have ‘a considered personal view on this subject.’<sup>121</sup>

Consequently, it was decided that a discursive analysis of contemporary minority ethnic media would be conducted in an attempt to access the minority ethnic

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<sup>120</sup> Organisations contacted include *The Commission for Racial Equality*, *The National Assembly Against Racism*, *Operation Black Vote*, *the National Black Students Alliance*, *the London Black Women Council*, *Black Londoners Forum*, *The Chinese in Britain Forum*, *the British Chinese Society*, *The Chinese Women’s Association*, *the Muslim Council of Britain*, *the London Association of Asian Youth* and other local minority ethnic organisations.

<sup>121</sup> Personal correspondence, August 2002.

voice on mixedness. However, it soon became clear that an extensive analysis of this media was beyond the possibilities of this project due to time and financial limitations.<sup>122</sup> As a result, the analysis has focused on both the material from minority ethnic media that was readily available as well as material from the mainstream media which reports minority ethnic voices directly. Through this, a tentative framework of the key areas of the minority ethnic voice on mixedness in the UK has been sketched out.<sup>123</sup>

As with the mainstream debates, there appears to be much more focus in minority ethnic debates on interracial relationships than on mixedness *per se*. Whilst the inclusion of the minority ethnic voice on interracialism in the mainstream media has also been primarily on interracial relationships, the minority ethnic media has also taken this as its main focus. Although minority ethnic magazines and websites, particularly those that target the Black community such as *The Voice*, *New Nation*, *Pride* and *Ebony*, periodically feature articles on interracial relationships, those that focus directly on mixed race people appear to be less evident. In this respect, a noticeable minority ethnic public debate on mixedness that goes beyond interracial mixing to include mixed race identity appears to be absent. Where elements of such a debate can be glimpsed, they would appear to have been triggered by the same factors that provoked a discourse on mixedness amongst minority ethnic groups in the USA – Tiger Woods and the option of identifying ‘multiracially’ on the Census.

The first strands of a contemporary UK debate on mixedness began to appear in the early 1990s, often over the mooted ‘mixed race’ category in the 2001 UK Census. As the ‘90s progressed, these strands began to intensify, particularly after Tiger Woods’s decision to identify as multiracial hit British shores. Amongst the number of white and mixed race contributors and voices on this

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<sup>122</sup> Unlike in the USA, where archived issues of minority ethnic publications and other sources are readily available, the smaller scale of the minority ethnic media in the UK means that archived issues are either not accessible or are only accessible through payment per article.

<sup>123</sup> It is clear that much more work needs to be done on collecting the voices of minority ethnic groups in Britain on mixedness. See chapter 7 for further discussion.



issue,<sup>124</sup> a few monoracial minority voices could also be discerned. the most vocal of which was the late black Labour MP. Bernie Grant. who was against the inclusion of a category. In line with many black American objections. Grant opposed the category on the basis of anti-racist solidarity:

*Society sees mixed-race people as black, and they are treated as black.  
They are never accepted as white, so they have no choice*<sup>125</sup>

However, unlike in the USA, Grant's concerns were apparently little echoed by other prominent monoracial minority ethnic figures. Whilst Lee Jasper, the black British Race Advisor to the London Mayor, critiqued the 'Mixed' category as a reflection of the 'muddled thinking' of central government on race – saying that 'mixed as a reflection of two pure wholes coming together in complete fabricated nonsense'<sup>126</sup> – he did not frame his criticism in terms of 'black solidarity'. At the same time, discernible support for the category amongst monoracial minorities was similarly limited, although a few figures, such as the Asian journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, argued for the necessity of recognising mixed race people as 'mixed'.<sup>127</sup> Whilst a pro- and anti-category debate amongst people of mixed race could be discerned in some sections of the mainstream media,<sup>128</sup> it appears that, unlike in the USA, a similarly vocal minority monoracial debate was largely absent. Although some campaigners from the African community in Scotland protested against the placing of the 'Mixed' category after the White category and before the Black categories – on the basis that such a placing suggested an 'apartheid' priority of importance<sup>129</sup> – direct criticisms of the category in the public arena as a whole appear to have been few and far between. Indeed, whilst the subject of mixed race is clearly becoming more and more

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<sup>124</sup> See chapters 3, 4 and the following section of this chapter for more on these voices and the Census debate.

<sup>125</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 May 1997. Interestingly, Grant was a parent of a child who might be identified as 'mixed race'.

<sup>126</sup> Brown Britain, aired on 29 September 2001, Channel 4.

<sup>127</sup> However, although Alibhai-Brown did write on supporting the recognition of mixedness, she did not specifically appear to do so in the context of the inclusion of the Census category. Alibhai-Brown is also a parent of mixed race children.

<sup>128</sup> See *The Guardian*, 11 December 1996, 21 February 2000, 20 August 2001, 22 August 2001; *The Evening Standard*, 18 April 2001; *The Independent*, 9 August 1998.

<sup>129</sup> *The Sunday Herald*, 22 April, 2001.

noticeable in the mainstream media, the monoracial minority voice is still decidedly lacking. Moreover, where it is present, it is usually not directly represented but conveyed through the voice of mixed race people, in terms of relating their experiences of acceptance or, increasingly, rejection from the minority monoracial community. In a piece in the *Guardian* after the category's inclusion, Claire Gorham, the mixed race former editor of a black British lifestyle magazine, wrote extensively about how she had received vitriolic abuse from some of the magazine's black readership for being the 'wrong shade of black' as well as the general derision and scorn she has received from some sectors of the black community.<sup>130</sup> Other articles have also presented similar accounts from mixed race people of the hostility or rejection they have faced from the communities of their minority monoracial heritage.<sup>131</sup>

As discussed earlier in the context of the American multiracial debate, such accounts go against the common perception that the minority ethnic side of a mixed race person's heritage is more likely to accept them as a member of the community than the white side, particularly if that side is black. It is clear from the accounts presented by the mixed race people in the articles cited and some of the cyberbased data that it is erroneous to talk of unconditional acceptance of mixed race people whether in the UK or the USA by the minority monoracial side of their heritage. Indeed, the legacy of the black consciousness movement that took root in the UK in the 1970s, where many black people considered that relationships with white people represented a denial of black identity (Tizard and Phoenix, 2003; p38), obviously has certain implications for the way that mixed race people may be seen by some in the black community. Gorham, for example, was once told by a member of the Nation of Islam that she was 'the embodiment of plantation master-slave rape'.<sup>132</sup> For other minority monoracial communities, similarly to the American situation, their place in the racial formation process may entail other legacies which prevent the full membership of mixed race persons into the community.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 February, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> See *The Independent*, 16 April, 1994; *The Guardian*, 1 July, 1994

<sup>132</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 July, 1994.

<sup>133</sup> Again, it is difficult to find substantial discursive evidence of this in the UK context.



Whilst it is difficult to speak at length and with confidence on the attitudes of minority ethnic monoracials towards mixedness, particularly those who are not black British who are largely absent in the public discourse, the lack of a noticeable, vocal debate as can be seen in the States leads to the suggestion that mixedness is less of an issue for minority monoracial communities in the UK. Despite the accounts mentioned previously, it would appear that whilst there are pockets of hostility towards mixedness, there is not the widespread sense of scepticism or resentment that can be found amongst some minority monoracial groups in the USA. The attack on mixed race people by a contributor in a forum on the black internet site, Blacknet – who claimed that mixed race people were ‘polluting’ the black race – was unanimously and heavily criticised by other black contributors, who pointed out that mixed race people were part of the black community, whether they identified as black or mixed race.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, as illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, the ‘black’ newspaper, *The Voice*, which has been criticised in the past for its representation of interracial relationships, recently announced that it is extending its readership to include mixed race people, as it recognises their growing presence in the black community.<sup>135</sup> Whilst the inclusion of mixed race people in the black community has often been believed to be dependent on the understanding that they identify as black, there would appear to be an increasing tendency amongst monoracial black British people to include mixed race people in the community even if they identify as mixed. The factors that have led to this greater ‘acceptance’ of mixedness in the UK will be discussed in conjunction with those that have led to a greater ‘scepticism’ in the USA in a later section. Before this, let us turn first to the views of majority monoracials in the UK towards mixedness.

### *British Majority Monoracial Views*

As discussed in chapter 2, the patterns of pathology that emerged from the ‘first wave’ of white conceptualisations of mixedness are still evident in the UK. However, as with the American situation, the negotiation of racial projects means

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<sup>134</sup> <[www.blacknet.co.uk](http://www.blacknet.co.uk)>

<sup>135</sup> *The Observer*, 11 July 2004.

that the reconceptualisation of mixedness is also being embraced by many sections of white British society, with the more extreme forms of pathologisation being pushed to the margins of society. Nevertheless, in the British situation, unlike in America, it should be noted that there has not emerged a specific, highly vocal white contingent, such as white parents or political supporters of mixed identification.

This is not to say that sections of white British society have been uninterested or silent on the issue of mixedness. Indeed, it is in the white mainstream media that newspaper and magazine articles, and television and radio programmes have featured, led by and including those of white and mixed race backgrounds. Within much of this media arena, the white voices that have contributed to the discussions on mixedness are those of parents of mixed race children or those who are in an interracial relationship. Undoubtedly, the majority of these discussions have taken place within the white liberal press and, as in the States, are generally headed by white women, reflecting the dominant pattern of interracial relationships between black and white groups in the UK. For the most part, the discussions tend to focus on the injustice of the prejudice that many mixed race people often face and the positive sense of self that they as parents try to instil in their children. What is interesting about the discussions of mixedness within this group of people, particularly within a comparative US context, is that they are noticeably less forceful and prescriptive than their American counterparts. Whilst many of these discussions demonstrate the support of the parents for a mixed identity for their children, there is often an accompanying understanding that their children may not be seen in this way and that a minority monoracial identity may also be accessible and of use to them. Indeed, although UK mixed race organisations, such as PIH, which supported the 'Mixed' category, tend to have monoracial as well as mixed race members, there appears to be no noticeable campaigning 'white parent' contingent similar to the white parents of Project RACE. In light of the absence of a large, college aged and educated mixed race group in the UK to oversee the 'leadership' of such organisations – as is now happening in the States – the lack of the white parental voice to represent the 'rights' of their mixed race children is quite distinctive.



Where there is noticeable vocal support white voice for a mixed category and identification, it has tended to be amongst academics and government officials. Although some such as Richard Berthoud opposed the 'Mixed' category, on the basis that the lack of homogeneity of the mixed group makes it a meaningless category, others, such as Angela Dale, were in favour of its inclusion as a means to recognise a growing racial identity.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, as discussed in detail in chapter 4, the CRE – along with other governmental advisory bodies – were also highly in favour of the category, again on the basis of the need to reflect the 'increasing diversity' of the UK.<sup>137</sup> The following statement of the BBC, arguably a barometer of social norms, reflects the growing recognition of mixed identities:

*The BBC has set up a seven-strong team to investigate how its programmes reflect the racial mix of British society. And it has coined a new phrase: Brown Britain [...] Brown Britain is a catchall phrase to reflect an increase in the number of mixed-race couples, families and children. A spokeswoman said the BBC was duty-bound to serve mixed-race audiences better<sup>138</sup>.*

Thus, whilst there is clearly a form of mixed race debate in the UK, it appears to be less powerful in both magnitude and feeling than the multiracial debate in the USA. The lack of participation from key minority representatives and organisations, the relatively low level debate over Census categories in the media and the absence of any significant resistance to the 'Mixed' category as reported by those involved in the Census process suggests that the politics of mixed race is much less provocative than the politics of multiraciality in the USA. Indeed, the high level of debate in the USA regarding the multiracial category and its implications has produced so much material that it is quite overwhelming. As DaCosta puts it, 'with the changes in the collection of racial data by the state, the genie is out of the bottle' (DaCosta, 2003; p81). There is an increasing sense that multiraciality is becoming the key negotiated racial issue in the USA, forcing minority monoracial groups and individuals in particular into a defensive or

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<sup>136</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 May 1997.

<sup>137</sup> *The Evening Standard*, 18 April 2001.

<sup>138</sup> *Mail on Sunday*, 8 December 2002.

supportive position on mixed identity at the personal and political level. Meanwhile, in the UK, although there is a sense of the relative invisibility of mixedness in the arena of race politics, there is concomitantly a climate of recognition and acceptance of mixedness that is absent from the US context. The obvious question here is why.

### **The UK and USA Debates**

The analysis of the debates in the UK and USA lead us to draw several key points about the politics of mixedness in the two countries. The first is that of the similarity that can be found in the general framework within which both of these debates operate – that is, that the politics of mixed race in the UK and USA are dominated by the politics of ‘blackness’. In both contexts, discussions largely presume that mixed race refers to black and white mixing or people from those backgrounds whilst the majority of minority monoracial commentators are also black. Considering the high rates of exogamy and the mixed Asian population of many Asian communities in both countries, the lack of monoracial Asian voices in the debate is extremely interesting.

In some sense, the lack of Asian and other minority voices in the debates appears to be connected to the centrality of ‘blackness’ as the key racial component in UK and US racial formation patterns. By this, it should be made clear that ‘whiteness’ is as central to these patterns as ‘blackness’ is, despite the fact that it is usually conceived of as a non-existent or normal component. As previous chapters have shown, the way in which the one-drop rule is now so adhered to by contemporary black communities in the USA is not a simple result of the ways in which black racial projects have developed but is rather a result of the ways in which they have developed because of, and as a reaction to, white racial projects. Consequently, the notion of black hypodescent is so embedded in American racial formation theory that not only is the debate largely dominated by an exchange between black Americans, whites Americans and black/white multiracial Americans but that black-minority mixes are often conceptualised as black. As demonstrated in the attitudes presented from the cyberstudy in chapter



5. the attitude that ‘black is black’ reigns in the USA. even if another minority is involved:

*Jules: You remember Antoine Roccamorra, half black, half Samoan, used to call him Tony Rocky Horror?*

*Vincent: Yeah, maybe. Fat, right?*

*Jules: I wouldn't go so far as to call the brother fat, I mean, he got a weight problem. What's the nigger gonna do? He's Samoan.*

*Pulp Fiction (1994)*

This casual conversation about a black-minority mix between writer/director Quentin Tarantino's characters displays the way in which what Spencer (2003) calls the ‘Kravitz principle’<sup>139</sup> extends beyond blackness and whiteness to encompass blackness and ‘otherness’. Whilst recognising the ‘other’ part of Roccamorra's mixed heritage (his Samoan background), through his use of ‘black’ identifiers – ‘brother’ and ‘nigger’ – the black character Jules indicates that he considers Roccamorra to belong to the black community. This complex interplay of simultaneous recognition and denial of that part of the mixed background which is not black – even if it is not white – can be seen in the labelling in America of minority-minority mixes such as the African-American/Samoan wrestler/actor The Rock, the black Trinidadian/Indian rapper Foxy Brown and of course, the African-American/Asian/Native American White Tiger Woods, as simply ‘African-American’.

The emerging tendency of those from black-minority mixed backgrounds to question the dominance of blackness in their heritages is increasingly putting pressure on the dominance of blackness in the political race arena of the States.<sup>140</sup> Whilst concessions have long been made to the idea that the adoption of a black identity by those of black and white mixed backgrounds is necessary to counter racism and provide a strong self of racialised self, it is argued that such a stand is less essential when there is an equally strong minority identity

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<sup>139</sup> See ‘The Multiracial Debate’ section in this chapter for the Lenny Kravitz comment in which the mixed black/white American singer states that mixed race people should adopt a black identity.

<sup>140</sup> Although, interestingly, as the ethnographic study showed, where mixed black/other people create new terms to express their mixing of black and other, the black heritage dominates even the terminology (*Blasian*, *Blaxican*, *Blackanese*, *Afroasian*) as white heritage has previously also done (*Eurasian*, *Anglo-Indian*)

with which it is possible to identity (Thornton & Gates, 2001). However, the attempt to adopt a racial identity other than black in a racialised system in which the one-drop rule is so inscribed is painted as futile by many black critics, even when other minorities are involved. Identifying as black, they argue, is the best way to ensure that those of all black/mixed race backgrounds are equipped to deal with discrimination and prejudice as they would then have recourse to support and understanding from an established and confident black community. Blackness is so stigmatised in America, argue critics such as Spencer (1997), that even other minority ethnic communities are prejudiced against those who have black heritage. For Spencer, since both majority and minority monoracials see mixed black-minority mixes as black and that minority monoracials are less welcoming to those of mixed black backgrounds, mixed black individuals need to identify, at least, politically as black in order to counter effectively stigmatisation and prejudice.<sup>141</sup>

Although many minority-minority mixes take umbrage at these prescriptive sentiments, there is an undeniable truth in such arguments. Whilst the processes of negotiation and transformation of Asian American racial projects have meant that white/Asian mixes are often conceived of quite favourably amongst Asian groups, the processes of black racial projects in the USA means that black Asian mixes are often looked on much less favourably by Asian communities (Thornton and Gates, 2001; Spickard, 2003). As minority groups begin to jostle with African-Americans for dominance and position in the racial formation of the USA – as evinced by the Census debates – the tensions of authenticity and legitimacy for mixed race people may be particularly acute depending on the mixes involved.

The interplay between blackness, mixedness and otherness leads to the second key point arising from the discursive analysis of the mixed race and multiracial debates, which is the way in which the dominant frame of blackness operates in the two countries. Despite the similarity with which blackness dominates debates on mixedness in both the UK and USA, it must be made clear that the

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<sup>141</sup> See also Springwood & King in Baird-Olson, 2003; p201.



conceptualisation of blackness is significantly different in both these countries, which has a significant effect on the ways in which mixedness is being conceptualised.

As just argued, in the USA, blackness is constructed prescriptively, in the sense that it is inextricably tied to the notion of hypodescent and, consequently, accompanying ideas of black authenticity and community loyalty, no matter if there are other heritages involved. However, whilst the notion of hypodescent and its accompanying criteria is also present in the UK, there is also a concomitant 'flexibility' of blackness which operates at a personal level, if not always at a public or political one. The inclusion of and lack of significant debate over the four-tiered 'Mixed' category and the expansion of *The Voice* newspaper to include people of mixed backgrounds are examples of the way in which this flexibility operates. Whilst there is undoubtedly a notion of the 'black community' and the 'Asian community' in the UK in a national, political sense, there is also clearly an accompanying notion of 'black and Asian communities' in a more 'localised' sense, where ethnicity – Caribbean, African, Jamaican, Somali, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi – is recognised and acknowledged. As such, the emerging conceptualisation of having a 'mixed' background as identified by the Census and mixed people themselves is appearing able to slot in alongside these other 'ethnicities' as both a separate individual identity and as part of wider black and Asian identifying communities, both of which are still primarily conceptualised as 'other' in opposition to 'whiteness'.

Again, it should be made clear that the argument here is not that there is an unconditional and unproblematic acceptance or integration of mixed identities in the UK but that, in comparison with the USA, there is a far greater degree of negotiation around their legitimacy within the racial formation process as there is around the legitimacy of other racial (or racialised) projects. In America, however, an impasse appears to have been reached between black and multiracial Americans over who has the greater 'right' to define individual and group identification, an impasse which is representative of a wider standoff over the ownership and meaning of racial identity. As argued in chapter 4, with representation on the Census and other racial and ethnic monitoring forms

involving a much more tangible sense of access or denial to financial and social privileges, the politics of mixed race in the USA are much sharper and more emotive than they are in the UK.

With respect to the differences between the politics of mixed race and the politics of multiraciality as identified in this analysis, what are the implications of mixedness in the two countries? Without wishing to overgeneralise, it would seem that mixedness appears to be emerging as a primarily 'divisive' identity in the States and as a primarily 'personal' identity in the UK. What is meant by this is that claiming a multiracial identity in America is increasingly constructed as a political act separating the multiracial identity from the black community, whilst claiming a mixed race identity in the UK appears to be viewed more in terms of expressing one's individual heritage than stating a political alliance. What is particularly interesting about this is that the very 'rights' that black America is reluctant to grant to the multiracial activists who are vociferously lobbying for them appear to have been granted to mixed race Britons by a racial consensus on most sides.

Whilst, as argued and demonstrated earlier, there are other layers to this divisive/personal model, it is increasingly clear that mixed race and multiracial, the preferred terms of the UK and USA respectively, refer to progressively more different conceptualisations of mixedness, one of which is increasingly seen as another 'ethnic option', the other as a political statement. Not only does there appear to be little sign of the 'intense row' between politicians, academics and equal opportunity advisors that the Black British journalist Gary Younge claims was fuelled by the Mixed category<sup>142</sup> but, in comparison with the US furore over the multiracial category, what debate there was seems rather reserved.

In summary, whilst there are evidently common elements in the conceptualisation of mixedness in the two countries, it would appear that the differences between them are becoming increasingly more important. The next and final chapter will not only consider in more depth what the significance of these differences for the racial formation of the two countries but will discuss

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<sup>142</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 May 1997.

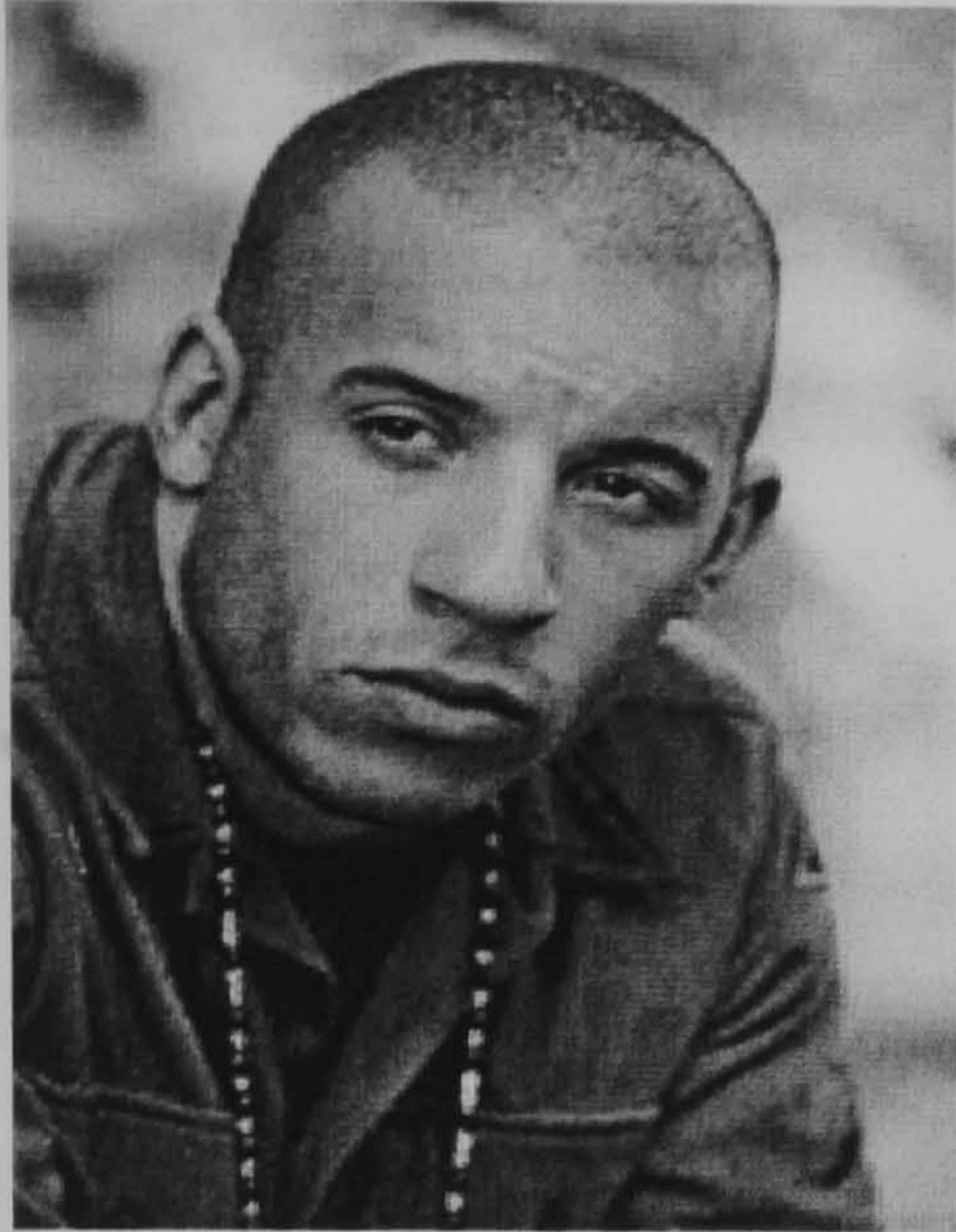


both the necessity of a British mixed race field of study as well as ways in which this might be established.



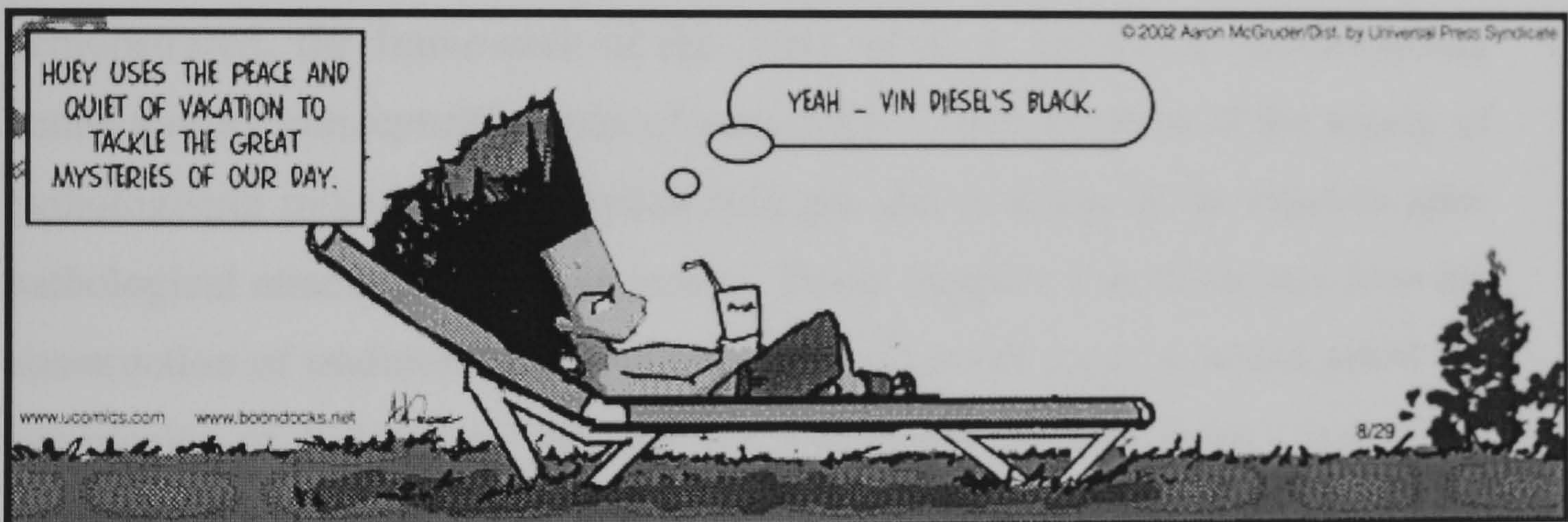
## Chapter 7:

### 'What Are You...Really?' Generation EA and the New Coloured People



*When I was growing up I had to deal with a lot of shit because I'm multi-cultural. There were no multicultural icons or role models when I grew up. I can't buy into labels because it diminishes what multiculturalism is and the courage of our parents who created all of us "harmony babies."*

*Vin Diesel*<sup>143</sup>



*The Boondocks*<sup>144</sup>

## Introduction

The central aim of this thesis has been to examine contemporary mixed race projects in the UK and USA, that is, the ways in which mixedness is being negotiated, resisted and accepted within the larger racial formation processes of the two countries and, concomitantly, the ways in which it is negotiating with

<sup>143</sup> <<http://www.vinvideo.com/trascripts/2002/tothyownselfbettrue.htm>>

<sup>144</sup> The Boondocks ©2002 Aaron McGruder. Distributed by Universal Press Syndrome. Extract from MixedFolks.com <[mixedfolks.com/comics.htm](http://mixedfolks.com/comics.htm)>



and transforming other racial projects. The chapters presented so far have focused on analysing key aspects of the personal, institutional and racially political debates that work to produce contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness and have highlighted the similarities between the white and black dominated framework of American and British projects as well as the crucial, but largely overlooked, differences in the ways in which both whiteness and blackness, as well as their interaction, are constructed in the two countries. This final chapter will summarise and discuss the main findings and arguments of the thesis overall before presenting some key directions for future research.

In brief, the analysis of contemporary mixed race projects in the UK and USA lead to two main contentions being put forward in this thesis. The first is that the dominance of the pathological framework of the 'first wave' of perceiving and constructing mixedness primarily in terms of 'black' and 'white' is being increasingly challenged by the counter-perceptions and constructions of a 'new wave', which posits mixedness as a normative state. As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, the framework of the 'first wave' is critical in understanding contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness – both in terms of the legacy of pathologising mixedness in popular thought and in terms of the reactive anti-pathological attacks of the 'new wave'. These chapters also illustrated how the construction of traditional American and British racial projects which pitted the superiority of 'whiteness' against the inferiority of 'blackness', led to the construction of a dominant racial discourse in which 'interracialism' was primarily seen as abnormal and undesirable. They then argued that the gradual negotiation and transformation of these racial projects within the wider racial formation processes, has seen a competing framework begun to emerge, one which essentially posits interracialism as a normal process and state. With mixed race people at the forefront of this discourse, this anti-pathological 'new wave' of constructing mixedness is having an increasing influence on the way that mixed race is perceived and constructed in both countries. However, although this new wave as a whole is clearly challenging the formerly dominant discourse, it is clear that there is an increasing schism within its ranks between those who

analytically engage with mixedness mainly in terms of *individual rights* (the ‘second wave’) and those who engage with it primarily in terms of *racial projects* (the ‘third wave’). For those of the ‘third wave’, the individualist focus of the ‘second wave’ limits understandings of mixedness to the personal psychological context interests of the ‘mixed race network’ and does not engage with the wider socio-political context and resulting issues.

Whilst recognising the important work that the ‘second wave’ has done in placing non-pathological approaches to mixed race on the agenda, this thesis is very much a part of the ‘third wave’ engagement with mixedness, in the sense that it seeks to understand mixedness in the UK and USA both as racial projects and as part of a wider process of racial formation. Consequently, although the thesis has focused on emerging contemporary debates on mixedness in the two countries, it has also located these debates within their particular socio-historical contexts in order to provide a fuller understanding of their emergence. As such, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on three key but largely unexplored fields of enquiry – the Census, cyberspace and minority monoracial groups – through which both the specificities and commonalities of the discourse around mixedness that has taken place in the UK and USA can be clearly observed.

The findings produced by the focus on these three areas lead to the second main contention of the thesis which is discussed in chapter 6. Here, it is argued that whilst both the UK and US debates on mixedness are principally directed by a framework in which concepts of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ are the prime determinants of the concept of mixedness, there are significant differences in the conceptualisation of mixedness in the two countries due to the ways in which these binary opposites have been determined. In short, although the overarching concepts of mixedness in the UK and USA share a similar broad constructive framework that has its roots in pathological conceptualisations of mixedness, to be ‘mixed race’ in the UK appears to be significantly different from being ‘multiracial’ in the USA. Whilst much of the discussion within the mixed race network revolves around shared discursive elements – the normality and legitimacy of mixed identities and the ‘right’ to identify racially as ‘mixed’ rather than ‘mono’ – it is increasingly noticeable that the particularity of the racial



formation frameworks within which they are located is significantly affecting the ways in which mixedness is being engaged with in the two countries. This, in turn, is also significantly affecting the ways in which other racial projects are themselves engaging and engaged with larger racial formation processes.

The following sections will thus discuss in more detail the implications of this engagement, by continuing to focus on the conceptual polarity that informs contemporary mixed race debates in the two countries. In addition to the polarisation between the legacy of 'first wave' perceptions and constructions and that of the new wave, contemporary debates are also marked by an increasing divergence in political and theoretical approaches to mixedness. The next section will discuss further the political approaches to mixedness before looking at theoretical issues. In brief, it will argue that the engagement with mixedness as more of a 'divisive' identity in the USA but as a 'personal' identity in the UK may be seen as representative of the wider tension within Anglo-American contemporary discourse between the conceptualisation of those of mixed race as 'The New Coloured People' or as 'Generation Ethnically Ambiguous' (Generation EA). Furthermore, it is argued that such positions are also representative of a wider tension in the approach to and conceptualisation of race, namely the 'pro-race' and 'post-race' perspectives.

### **Mixed race and multiracial – Generation EA and The New Coloured People**

At its initial point of departure, this thesis asked what it means to be mixed race in the UK and USA, for both self and society. In its analysis of important personal, institutional and racially political arenas which engage with mixedness – the conceptual legacy of the 'first wave', the 'second wave' and the Multiracial Movement, the Census, cyberspace, and minority monoracial debates – two key responses to the initial question have emerged. Without wishing to state the obvious, the first is that 'mixed race' clearly means many different things to many people. Whether it is in terms of viewing mixedness as the state of crossing different racial boundaries (and debating which boundaries are able or unable to be crossed), or as a means to highlight the fallacy – or saliency – of race, or as a personal identity, or as a political identity, mixedness remains a nebulous

concept, a racial Rorschach Test in which the both the viewing and interpretation of what is seen by the ‘inkblot’ of mixedness is itself open to further viewing and interpretation. Whilst this is particularly true at the individual, personal level, it also is evident at a group and institutional level as communities and organisations shift between different interpretations of what it means to be mixed.

The second and less obvious response to the question of the meaning of mixed race is that, amongst the different contemporary interpretations of mixedness, two distinct discursive strands stand out – the conceptualisation of mixed race as constituting either the ‘New Coloured People’ or ‘Generation EA’. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the New Coloured People conceptualisation of mixedness, which places great importance on acknowledging the wider politics of race, is a prevalent and powerful discourse particularly in the USA where it has clearly impeded the official recognition of multiraciality. Yet whilst this discourse is increasingly noticeable, it runs in tandem with the equally prevailing and influential Generation EA conceptualisation, which places great importance on acknowledging a personal choice approach to race.

As discussed in chapter 1, the phrase Generation EA has been coined by the American and British media to describe what they see as the growing number of young people whose racial or ethnic background appear indeterminate.<sup>145</sup> For the advertising, fashion and film industries, the ‘power of EA’ is increasingly being recognised as a major force for tapping into the market of ‘Generation Y’ – the western generation born in the 1980s and 1990s, many of whom are themselves of mixed racial backgrounds or who embrace elements of non-white lifestyles and cultures in fashion, music, sport and language.<sup>146</sup> Whilst the EA backgrounds of actors, models and sports stars such as Vin Diesel, Jessica Alba, Devon Aoki and Derek Jeter appeal to those Gen Y-ers who celebrate ‘mixedness’, marketers realise that EA public figures are also accessible to more ‘traditional’ audiences who often identify the EA figures as belonging to their ‘monoracial’ group. For example, the characters portrayed by Vin Diesel in films such as *Pitch Black*

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<sup>145</sup> See *The New York Times*, 28 December 2003; *The Observer*, 4 January 2004.

<sup>146</sup> *The Observer*, 4 January 2004. Also see earlier footnote in chapter 2 regarding the surveys carried out by *The Times* and the CRE which indicated a greater degree of acceptance of different races and ethnicities amongst younger Britons.



(2000), *The Fast And The Furious* (2001) and *XXX* (2002) have simultaneously been claimed as white, black and Latino, as well as mixed race, by fans and critics of the film alike. Consequently, Diesel has become one of the most highly sought after stars in Hollywood for his ability to appeal to the famously segregated American film market.<sup>147</sup>

The growing appeal of 'multiracial chic' (Gaskins in Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001; p5) in marketing and media spaces demonstrates that the new wave's reconfiguration of mixedness is beginning to make itself felt outside the 'elitist' boundaries of the mixed race network. Indeed, with the apparent emphasis on the normalcy of mixedness (the demand for mixed race children is apparently overtaking that for blond-haired, blue eyed children in the American advertising world)<sup>148</sup> and the refusal to define or have defined models, actors and entertainers, it is clear that the Generation EA trend is closely related to the discourse of the 'new wave'. However, a closer look suggests that the new 'positive' public discourse that is emerging around mixedness is largely concerned with the 'personal' context that has been identified within the 'second wave' rather than the more integrated approach that the 'third wave' has attempted to take. Whilst there are those who view the growing representation of mixedness in marketing arenas as symptomatic of both a greater acceptance of interracialism and freedom to express and celebrate diverse racial identity choices,<sup>149</sup> others have questioned the 'hazards' of the new visibility of mixedness (Streeter, 2003). For Streeter, the hazards of the ubiquitous representations of mixed race people in contemporary media is that these images are referenced by a certain multiculturalist ideology which emphasises 'the pleasurable aspects of ethnic diversity without engaging the challenge of cultural

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<sup>147</sup> The potential magnitude of the American film and television audience is diminished by racial and ethnic divisions as different groups apparently prefer to watch vehicles featuring characters that reflect their own backgrounds. The sitcom *Seinfeld*, which was consistently the top-rated television programme in white households ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in black American households. Meanwhile the top-rated comedy in black households, *Between Brothers*, was ranked 112<sup>th</sup> in white households. <[www.afrocentricnews.com](http://www.afrocentricnews.com)> Diesel's current popularity is in part due to his ability to appeal to all racial and ethnic sectors of the market. As such he has been rewarded, controversially, by being given the forthcoming big budget role of the African general Hannibal over the critically acclaimed 'black' actor, Denzel Washington.

<sup>148</sup> *The New York Times*, 28 December 2004.

<sup>149</sup> See *The New York Times*, 28 December, 2003; *The Observer*, 4 January 2004.

differences and the existence of racial hierarchies and racial inequality' (Streeter, 2003; p103). The focus on 'beautiful' mixed race people, she argues, does little to challenge the basis for social inclusion, whilst the fixation with mixed race babies and children is itself indicative of the tendency to infantilise the subject of mixedness and steer away from the politics of mixedness, in all its forms (Streeter, 2003). Indeed, captured in the lament of the American comedian Sandra Bernhard, who wished she 'were mixed race and beautiful and had everything happening for me',<sup>150</sup> this tendency by the media to focus on the 'superior beauty' and 'trendiness' of mixed race people ignores the discriminative legacy of the 'first wave' that many mixed race people continue to experience, and is indeed located within it with its echoes of the 'hybrid vigour' arguments of the 'first wave'. As we have seen, the embracing of such qualities is incredibly precarious, for the lens that sees the vigour in the hybrid is the same lens that, reversed, sees degeneration in the mulatto. Thus those who might find something to applaud in the adoption of a 'cool' EA look by the singer Kylie Minogue in the 1990s, might think again to hear her describe her semi-dreadlocked hairstyle as 'going berserk' and 'looking like a lost half-caste'.<sup>151</sup> The tragic mulatto, it would seem, is mutating in some areas into 'the tragically hip mulatto'.<sup>152</sup>

Streeter's critique of those who would unquestioningly herald the increase in mixed race representation as a victory for the acceptance and normalisation of mixedness echoes a strand of the 'third wave' critique. Similarly to the representation debate, this critique sees the Multiracial Movement desire to conceptualise mixedness at the level of individualism and personal rights, and not at the level of community and social politics, as both naïve and limiting in understanding mixedness. Interestingly, although the 'third wave' critique is largely supportive of the recognition of mixedness, in its concern with the socio-political implications of mixedness, the 'third wave' shares distinct elements

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<sup>150</sup> *The Observer*, 27 July 2003.

<sup>151</sup> 'Kylie's Cool World', *The Face* magazine, 1994.

<sup>152</sup> Julme, T. (2003) 'Marketing Ethnic Ambiguity: who benefits from advertising's latest trend?', *The College Hill Independent*  
<[www.brown.edu/Students/INDY?article.php?id=21&issue\\_id=184](http://www.brown.edu/Students/INDY?article.php?id=21&issue_id=184)>



with the New Coloured People conceptualisation. Amongst the different voices that have emerged in reaction to and outside of the pathological construction of the 'first wave', there is then a discernible binary divide in contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness in the UK and USA.

Whilst it is fair to say this binary divide of Generation EA and the New Coloured People is generally what differentiates each context, it should be noted that both conceptualisations are present and engaged with in each country. Whilst both the UK and the USA are experiencing the absorption stage of the racial formation process in the embedding of Generation EA and the 'second wave' approach in mainstream discursive and representative spaces, the American context is distinguished by a greater level of resistance discourse – in the form of the New Coloured People approach– than the UK context. Thus although the concept of Generation EA is very much American, in its form as a representative of mixedness as a personal choice, it would appear to be a conceptualisation that it is engaged with more as a possibility than an actuality. For all the talk that has emerged on the presence of Generation EA as evidence of the breaking down of racial barriers and fluidity of racial identity, the accompanying vocal discourse of the New Coloured People suggests that this is far from the case. Although the ethnically ambiguous appearance of public and private mixed race people is appealing or unnoticeable to some, many others refuse to accept the ambiguity or accept it as a facet, but not the core, of the person's racial identity. In a cultural climate in which the legibility of race is restricted to 'black' and 'white', (Streeter, 2003; p301) people still tend to be placed as one or the other, even where their mixedness is stressed or acknowledged. As illustrated by the Boondocks cartoon that introduced this chapter, like other public mixed race such as Derek Jeter, Tiger Woods and Mariah Carey, Diesel is frequently referred to or considered as black, by both black Americans and mainstream America at large, even though he and they consider themselves to be multiracial or refuse to label themselves racially.<sup>153</sup> Concomitantly, due to the racial

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<sup>153</sup> A recent debate on the Black Entertainment Television (BET) discussion forum took place over whether Diesel should 'come out' as black, with the majority of contributors arguing that it was his duty to publicly acknowledge his black heritage and avoid, whether consciously or unconsciously, passing for white <[www.bet.com/Community/](http://www.bet.com/Community/)>. Interesting, similar arguments

formation processes described in previous chapters, many ‘hapa’ entertainers – such as Keanu Reeves, Dean Cain, Meg and Jennifer Tilley – are similarly identified as monoracial although in this case it is their white rather than their ‘Chinese’ or ‘Japanese’ heritage which is seen as dominant.

In the UK, however, where the Generation EA discourse would appear to be more dominant than that of the New Coloured People, whilst it is clear that many mixed race people are publicly identified as black, the ability to be recognised as both black and mixed appears to be increasingly rooted in mainstream discourse. British mixed race public figures such as Angela Griffin, Kelly Holmes, Mel B and Craig David are frequently referred to as both black and mixed race in the media, sometimes within the same article or feature.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, when such figures do identify as mixed race, there appears to be less counter-New Coloured People discourse which urges them, and other people, to consider themselves ‘black’, as in the Tiger Woods case. Whilst the light-skinned mixed race actress Rashida Jones is both considered black in America and is the focus of discussions about her blackness in the American media,<sup>155</sup> when commenting on her recent appearance in a British drama, the British media have had little to say about her racial background, despite her high-profile ‘interracial couple’ parents.<sup>156</sup>

As argued throughout the thesis, whilst there are shared elements that allow us to speak of a general ‘Anglo-American’ framework of mixedness, it is clear that there are significant differences in the way in which contemporary conceptualisations of mixedness are operating within this framework, differences which suggest that a greater distinction between the contexts must be made when it comes to future analysis of mixedness. The next section will review these differences once more and discuss their implications for both racial formation

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rage in multiracial discussion forums over whether ‘monoracial’ figures should ‘come out’ as mixed race, with the majority of contributors arguing that they should. The *MixedFolks* website has a section that is devoted to ‘outing’ those with mixed heritage. <[www.mixedfolks.com](http://www.mixedfolks.com)>

<sup>154</sup> *The Mirror*, 1 September, 2004; *The Times*, 2 September, 2004;

<sup>155</sup> *The Voice*, 31 August 2004.

<sup>156</sup> *The Sun*, 21 August, 2004; *The Scottish Daily Record*, 18 August, 2004; *The Sunday Times*, 8 August, 2004. Meanwhile, Jones had a lead role in the UPN network drama ‘Girlfriends’, whose four main characters are all billed as ‘African Americans’. <[www.upn.com](http://www.upn.com)>. Jones is the daughter of the black record producer Quincy Jones and the white model Peggy Lipton.



processes in the two countries as well as considering for the field of mixed race studies as a whole.

### **The Implications of Mixedness: pro-race, post-race**

As the analysis of mixed race projects in the UK and USA has demonstrated, the recognition and acknowledgment of mixedness has significant implications at three levels: the personal, the institutional and racially political. Each of these levels, as discussed throughout the thesis, informs and is informed by the developments which occur at the other levels, as evinced by the debates that have taken place on the legitimacy of mixedness from individual, group and institutional quarters. Indeed, as the debate, or lack of debate, over official recognition shows, the question of recognising and acknowledging mixedness in the UK and USA is one which seems to lead constantly and inevitably to the question of ‘rights’, whether in terms of who is, isn’t or should be granted them, who is granting them and why, and who supports or opposes these decisions. By understanding approaches to mixedness in the UK and USA in these terms, not only are the key differences between the perceptions and constructions of mixedness in the two countries both exposed and better able to be understood, but so too are the implications of mixedness for the racial formation processes of the UK and USA. Furthermore, if we see the implications of contemporary mixedness primarily in terms of ‘rights’ at all three levels of the personal, institutional and political we are also awarded an opportunity to advance the mixed race studies field as a whole, by being forced to engage with some of the more difficult questions this theoretical terrain throws up. The following final sections will broach this terrain through looking at what is initially proposed as the next theoretical frontier for mixed race studies – and particularly for those of the ‘third wave’ – the conceptualisation of mixed race as operating within either a ‘pro-race’ or ‘post race’ framework.

#### *Mixed race, pro-race*

As demonstrated in previous chapters, whilst the ‘first wave’ conceptualisation of mixedness is still the backdrop against which contemporary discourse on

mixedness is played, the increasing authority of minority racial projects is progressively shaping this discourse. The interaction between these projects –which can be seen in the tension between the New Coloured People and Generation EA discourses presented earlier – suggests that the issue of ‘mixedness’ is seen as just as complex amongst minority monoracial groups as it is amongst majority monoracials. The complexity of the issue would appear to be particularly acute for the contemporary US racial formation process, where not only that which Zack calls the ‘ordinary’ concept of race – which as recalled from chapter 3 is the idea that racial categories are primarily cultural categories, passing on racial characteristics as traits is strongly entrenched but so also is the relationship between this concept and that of ‘rights’. Concomitantly, the historical process of racial formation in the USA has created a climate in which those with any black heritage are expected to express solidarity with or loyalty to the political black struggle as a matter of principle (Tessman, 1999). However, as Tessman points out, whilst the very same argument can and is made about white people – that in order to be anti-racist, they too should express and act on this solidarity – mixed race people are largely expected to do this primarily through their own identities, that is, to identity as black. There has then emerged what might be called ‘a moral imperative’ for mixed race people to express the political through the personal (Zack, 1992; Tessman, 1999). As we have seen, to do otherwise is to arise suspicions of wanting to distance oneself from the black cause and gain the resulting socio-cultural privileges. For Tessman, it is this moral imperative that is frequently concealed behind the ‘what are you...really?’ questions discussed throughout the thesis. If it is presumed that loyalty is itself determined by identity, the ‘what are you?’ questions can be translated as standing for the question ‘where does your political allegiance lie?’ (Tessman, 1999; p280). This imperative can be seen to work hand in hand with the attempt to reposition the nebulous state of mixedness into the binary either/or racialised framework. Whilst the racial background of the questioner may make the answer to the question more acute for some questioners than for others, the testimonies of mixed race people indicate that there is frequently an assignment of their identities by the questioner to a single racial category or the assumption that the



mixed race person does or should embrace one element of their racial identity over the other.

As we have seen, the moral imperative of political allegiance to blackness is very much at the heart of the New Coloured People discourse. However, as has also been demonstrated, this moral imperative is being challenged by the personal rights demanded and expressed in the discourse of Generation EA. On the one hand, this challenge is being played out at the individual level and is proving particularly difficult for New Coloured People discourse through the question of precedence for minority-minority mixes. As discussed in chapter 6, the accusation that identifying as mixed means walking away from an oppressed group is less effective when the other group has itself a legacy of oppression. On the other hand, the moral imperative is being challenged head on by its appropriation by multiracial activists who are applying it in terms of loyalty to 'multiraciality'. For growing numbers of activists, mixed race people have just as much responsibility to the 'mixed race community' as they do to the monoracial communities of their backgrounds.<sup>157</sup> In this respect, identifying personally as mixed is seen by activists not so much as an act of disloyalty to minority monoracial communities but as an act of loyalty to the multiracial one (Tessman, 1999). Whilst such a stance fuels those proponents of the New Coloured People discourse – which asks what the rewards of this loyalty are – it is clear that the presence of mixedness as a racial identity which demands to be seen as valid and equal as others has now firmly claimed its place within the arena of racial politics.

Consequently, what this line of debate also clearly shows is that, in the USA, the question of mixedness, is currently very much rooted in what might be called a 'pro-race' framework, that is where mixedness is not promulgated or explored as a means to challenge or go beyond the notion of race but is seen as a component, whether legitimate or not, of the notion of race itself. In this respect, the implications that mixedness has for the racial formation process, particularly in the USA, is that it works to support and uphold the racialisation of identities in

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<sup>157</sup> For examples of the call for allegiance to the mixed community, see: [www.interracialvoice.com](http://www.interracialvoice.com)

the sense that it is seen as part of, rather than a challenge to, the concept of race. However, whilst mixedness is largely considered in the US from a pro-race perspective, such a perspective is not completely uncontested. Indeed, running alongside the pro-race framework is a counter-framework which might be dubbed 'post-race', from within which mixedness is viewed essentially as a means not just to challenge but to go beyond the concept of race. Whilst this counter-framework can certainly be found within the mixed race debates in the US, as the following section will discuss, it is actually within the UK that it appears to be emerging more noticeably.

### *Mixed race, post-race*

Whilst the majority of the contemporary US debate on mixedness operates within a dominant pro-race framework, there is nevertheless a strand within the multiracial movement which is concerned with the notion of mixedness as a means to transcend race. As discussed in chapter 3, Zack is the most vocal proponent of this position in her call for 'deracination', that is, the refusal to identify oneself or others racially. However, whilst Zack's proposal that 'racelessness [is] the next freeing stage after microdiversity' (Zack, 1995: p301) is a sentiment that is often shared by many within or interested in the multiracial movement in the USA – as evinced by cyberspace forums as shown in chapter 6 – the main focus remains that which locates mixedness firmly within a theoretical pro-race camp, with the demand for recognition of mixed identities in the here and now and the accompanying individual and group rights that the acceptance of mixedness as a legitimate racial identity in the racial arena will bring. In this respect, whilst there exists an opposing perspective in the USA that sees mixedness as able to go beyond race, one which is 'post-race' as it were, it currently wields a smaller and distinctly less effective discursive banner.

In the UK, however, it would appear that a slightly different picture is emerging. Whilst it would be over-reaching to argue that in the UK the contemporary debate on mixedness operates within a post-race framework, it would nevertheless appear to be the case that mixedness is more readily able to be seen as not just a means to deconstruct the notion of race but as a means to move



beyond it. The increasing tolerance, acceptance and celebration in the UK of what Hall has called ‘new ethnicities’ that is ‘a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities’ (Hall, 1992 p257) has created a climate in which the challenges to existing racial formation processes presented by mixedness are understood as part of a wider transformative racial and ethnic package. On the one hand, therefore, we have frequent, casual referrals in the British media to mixedness as representative of harmonious race relations, with proud press reports of how the UK is one of the countries with the highest level of interracial relationships in the world and a burgeoning mixed race population. This proposition of the UK as a race relations utopia is often personified in the image of the mixed race person who embodies racial harmony and the disintegration of racial boundaries. On the other hand, however, as argued previously in the thesis, the notion that the state of mixedness challenges the concept of race simply through its very hybridity is a double-edged sword. As Young’s historical account of hybrid mixedness has shown, for all the positive accounts and defence of the individual strength and beauty and social group harmony produced by racial mixing, there have been equal, indeed more numerous, pronouncements against the individual and group weakness the hybrid state produces (Young, 1995). Thus behind every glowing report that celebrates the positive coming together of black and white to produce the hybrid vigour and pride as represented by the mixed race British athlete Kelly Holmes, lurks the damning account of the hybrid degeneracy and shame as embodied by the mixed race ‘shoebomber’ Richard Reid.<sup>158</sup>

In this respect, the challenge to the concept of race as presented by theorising mixedness as a hybrid identity which engages rather than suppresses difference may help us to deconstruct the notion of race but in the end has the result of reinforcing and reifying the concept rather than dismantling it. Whilst approaching mixedness in terms of its inhabiting ‘the third space’ discussed in chapter 1 may be useful in helping illustrate the *processes* by which mixedness is

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<sup>158</sup> For an account of how Reid embodies and exposes the continuing belief in the hybrid degenerate, see Gilroy, 2004, pp138-142.

produced, as the arguments over who is really mixed and who is not in the cyberspace discussion show, ultimately the third space of hybridity begins itself to be established and engaged with as an 'original moment'. Such an engagement, as outlined earlier, can be clearly seen in the American situation where 'mixedness' becomes an identity that demands equal recognition and legitimacy and consequently moves from a post-race to a pro-race framework.

However, as argued in previous sections, due to the differences in the racial formation processes of the UK and USA, particularly as regards the less entrenched social and legal relationship in the UK between race and rights, mixedness is not as firmly placed within a pro-race framework as it is in the USA. Consequently, the conceptual space in which theorisation of race takes place not only allows for greater flexibility in terms of engaging race equally alongside ethnicity – giving rise, eventually, to the idea of Hall's 'new ethnicities' and the acceptance of mixedness as one of these – but also provides greater scope with which to engage mixedness as a means to challenge race both in terms of deconstruction and transcendence. Though it is admittedly in its early stages, there is a tentative emergent strain of thought in the UK that distinctly posits mixedness within a post-race framework in the sense that it not only sees mixedness as a stage on the way to transcending race, but acknowledges the wider issues of what is becoming known as 'post-race' theory. Two of the most recent British studies of mixedness published have clearly adopted a 'post race' perspective, in the sense that they can or do envisage mixedness as a tool to transcend race. For Olumide (2002) those who form part of the 'mixed race condition' as a group have:

*...some possibilities [...] to transcend race. Through identification with groups in the present and the past that have been similarly defined it is important to challenge the racial axes of social division. In the most profound sense, anti-racism (which has become a very moth-eaten construct) must endeavour to be anti-race. Nothing less will do.*

(Olumide, 2002; p5).

Nevertheless, though Olumide states that there is a need for thinking and strategy as regards utilising mixed race to transcend race, she does not quite engage with



the whys and wherefores of how this might be done. As with much of the American work in the same vein, the call for transcendence is greater than the discussion around the achievement of this. However, Ali's (2003) work which emerged shortly after this does only not engage with viewing mixedness as a possible step to the transcendence of race but also locates the ways in which mixedness might do this within a wider post-racial theoretical framework. In addition to employing what she calls 'post-race thinking' to emphasise 'deconstructive approaches to identity' (Ali, 2003; p9), she also places her engagement of mixedness with the post-race framework as outlined by Paul Gilroy with whom she shares the view that it is necessary for society to free itself 'from the bounds of raciology' – that is 'the lore that brings the virtual realities of "race" to dismal and destructive life' (Gilroy, 2000; p11) – and 'compulsory raciality' (Ali, 2003; p18). For Gilroy, such 'creative acts involved in destroying raciology and transcending "race" are more than warranted by the goal of authentic democracy to which they point' (Gilroy, 2000; p12). He argues that that whilst it was necessary in the past to show 'how "'race"' could be articulated together with other dimensions of power and to demonstrate the formative force of imperial and colonial relations in shaping metropolitan social life' (Gilroy, 2000; p334), if we are to get beyond race then a critical theory of raciology must now break with these former articulations of racial discourse and division make a fresh account of political work and tasks around these areas. However, Gilroy's forceful assertions that we are now in a position to do this are not as strongly matched in terms of strategies regarding how this might be achieved, other than a somewhat vague call to the idea of a 'becoming oriented towards the idea of a cosmopolitan future' (Gilroy, 2000; p335):

*Our challenge should now be to bring even more powerful visions of planetary humanity from the future into the present and to reconnect them with democratic and cosmopolitan traditions that have been all but expunged from today's black political imaginary.*  
Gilroy, 2000; p356

Similarly, Ali's work is also unclear about how her move away from 'a recognition of the power of the politics of race and the need for 'strategic

essentialism'' towards viewing mixedness as a conduit for the 'radically racial deconstructive aspirations' she shares with Gilroy will be received (Ali, 2003: p180; Gilroy, 2000; p34). Indeed, if there is no concrete alternative to replace either 'the privileges of the beneficiaries of racial hierarchies' or 'the hard-won oppositional identities' with all 'the precious forms of solidarity and community that have been created by [the] protracted subordination along racial lines' then as Gilroy himself notes, 'this may be a hard argument to win' (Gilroy, 2000: p12).

With no clear or convincing strategies or suggestions in place, it is fair to say that the mixed race, post-race framework does not currently appear to be a real competitor to the mixed race, pro-race framework discussed earlier. However, when we consider the work of St Louis, there are emerging some clearer pointers about how a post-race framework might be advanced further. If we apply St Louis' discussion of how a post-race framework might develop, the pressing question for multiracial theorists, as well as other monoracial theorists is how to 'reconcile identifying the micropolitical with the demands of building an effective politics' (St Louis, 2002; p657), that is how to balance the individual's choice to identify multiracially with a non-divisive commitment to the political action of community and anti-racism. In light of the previous analysis of the implications of mixedness for racial formation processes in the UK and USA, as well as the field of mixed race studies as a whole, St Louis' discussion of the challenge of political responsibility in a world which is experiencing more and more the end of essential subjectivities, particularly the 'essential black subject' (Hall, 1992), is highly relevant for mixed race projects, and the American one in particular. Such a challenge, he argues, must emphasise 'the desirability of recognizing *both* the vagaries of politics reducible to monolithic interest groups and the danger of its attendant social ready-to-wear identities, *and* retaining the capacity to engage social issues at the micro and informal level as *political* concerns' (St Louis, 2002: p657). Indeed, some theorists who are sympathetic to the demand for recognition of personal identity fear nevertheless that the 'multiracial agenda' will come to dominate racial discourse and research, engendering a discourse which is 'racism lite', that is, a scholarship that takes



little note of structural power other than the government Census and that sees the lack of recognition of mixedness as the most profound effect of racism (Texeira, 2003; p33). Whilst St Louis does not provide a developed framework for the ways in which the micropolitical might be balanced with wider political demands, he does outline more effectively and clearly than Gilroy the direction that post race theorists must take. In this respect, if mixed race theorists are hitching their colours to this mast they must also engage similarly with these questions, if theories of mixedness are to be useful beyond the confines of the mixed race network and form part of a wider body of contemporary race theory.

## Conclusion

The implications of mixedness would then appear to be centred around the moral imperative and the question of who owns racial identity. In the USA, whilst some white Americans have engaged in similar ethnically based debates – such as Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans (Sollors, 1997; Waters, 1999) – in terms of race, this contest appears now to be largely participated in by ‘coloured’ minority ethnic groups. Moreover, contemporary debates over this ownership seem to be conceptualised primarily as a contest between two forces – the individual and the community. Whilst the white hegemonic state has in the past been seen as a key claimant to the ownership of racial identities, contemporary racial projects are relegating its role as secondary to that of the individual and the community. Although, as chapter 4 demonstrated, the role of the State is still more influential than may be thought, the Census change towards self-identification and the impact of minority groups on the inclusion of categories indicates the growing dominance of the other two claimants.

Whilst elements of the implications for mixedness in terms of a moral imperative and racial ownership can also be seen in the British context, their presence is distinctly less acute than in America. As discussed previously, the greater flexibility of blackness – and increasingly whiteness<sup>159</sup> – in the UK as a political

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<sup>159</sup> Although America has a greater tradition of hyphenated white identities, whiteness in Britain also has a tradition of ethnic and even racial, options for whiteness, in its conceptualisation of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish identities. Unlike the US Census, the UK Census distinguishes between two categories of ‘whiteness’ – British and Irish (and arguably Jewish) and it is likely

and personal identity means that the contest between the state, the individual and the community is less infused with tension over ownership tension than it is in America.<sup>160</sup> In this respect, as argued elsewhere in the thesis, the importance of a differing historical context of race is key to understanding not just why mixedness is less of a conflictual issue for most sections of British society than for American ones but why studies of mixedness in Britain must operate within a framework that is constructed to take into account the specificities of British racial formation processes..

Whilst the increased British interest in mixedness since the 1990s has echoed the growing attention the issue has been granted in America, it should be noted that it has not been subject to the same level of intensity, either in terms of activist or opposing stances to its presence. Indeed, whilst there are a number of British grassroots organisations supporting mixed race people, their families and interracial couples they are neither as numerous nor as vocal as their counterparts in the States. Although this may partly be explained by the inclusion of a mixed category on the Census, it should be noted there was no significant lobby for the category beforehand as indeed there was no tangible opposition. For the most part, those mixed race organisations that have sprung up in the UK operate as support networks rather than activist groups and are more isolationist in nature. Indeed, there is little sign in the UK of the multiracial organisation ‘family’ framework which is common in the States – where local chapters of multiracial organisations are borne from the more established ‘parental’ organisations.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, the rapidly growing multiracial collegiate network that is becoming ever more prominent and influential in the States has no counterpart in the UK, meaning that those few voices that comment on mixedness in contemporary mainstream discourse appear largely representative of an individual or localised

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that other white identities will be recognised in the Census 2011 (personal interviews, ONS and Ethnicity Sub-group representatives, 2002).

<sup>160</sup> Increasingly, it would appear that the tension over ethnic and racial ownership, status and privilege in the UK is not centered around whiteness and blackness but over Muslim and non-Muslim identities. See Modood (1992), Alexander (2000).

<sup>161</sup> The oldest multiracial organisation in the USA, I-Pride, formed in 1979, was instrumental in the formation of AMEA, one of the most prominent activist organisations. AMEA itself now acts as an umbrella organisation, linking 14 other multiracial organisations and representing their interests at a national level (Brown & Douglass, 2003).



viewpoint rather than the ‘community’ or national perspective that is portrayed by American multiracial commentators.

The lack of British mixed race activism and minority monoracial opposition exemplifies the different racial formation processes that have occurred in the UK due to its distinct socio-historical context. Both the major and minor socio-historical differences need to be understood as having worked to produce a distinctly British conceptualisation of mixedness, despite the similarities of its overarching white/black framework with the American one. Whether in terms of the different histories of minority ethnic settlement, legislation on and attitudes towards interracial unions, the role of the State in assigning racial identities and the socio-economic privileges that accompany this or even the formation and importance of race based collegiate groups, such differences have worked to produce a distinct set of racial formation processes which make mixedness more of a ‘racial option’ than in the States.

In this respect, the implications for mixedness on the racial formation processes here would appear to be more that ‘blackness’ – or perhaps, when we look at the Census categories, ‘non-whiteness’ – has another identity option subset. This is, however, unless future consideration of mixedness in the UK transposes the complete American framework with all its divisive connotations. Whilst there is a long tradition of conceptualising mixedness in the UK by utilising the American framework, this has very much operated at the level of the individual, that is, largely in socio-psychological terms of personal identity, i.e. self-image and self-esteem. Such conceptualisations have been both negative and positive and, as demonstrated in chapter 2, have operated within a transatlantic framework of the ‘first’ and ‘second wave’, with understandings of the social and psychological status of the mixed race person being exchanged between the two countries. Although the transposing of American ‘second wave’ conceptualisations have been particularly useful in de-pathologising the British mixed race subject, further applications of the American framework need to be exercised with caution. As this thesis has clearly demonstrated in chapters 4 and 6, unlike Britain, the racial formation process in America has worked in such a way that the notion of ‘rights’ has a longstanding co-existent relationship.

socially and legally, with the notion of 'race'. whether this be in terms of denying or granting 'rights'. This difference is key to understanding not only why there have been such different responses to the official representation of mixedness in the two countries but why some of the theorising and conceptualisations of mixedness that have emerged in the American context may not be entirely applicable to the British situation. Indeed, with much of the 'second wave' 'personal right' understandings of mixedness being appropriated as a form of political demand in American public discursive spaces by multiracial activists – and with the political reactions of other groups to this – American conceptualisations of mixedness have gone beyond the level of individual rights and entered the arena of racial politics as a 'social movement'. Despite the confusion, even amongst activists, over whether this movement is being carried out on behalf of the individual or on behalf of the multiracial community, there can be no doubt as to its political nature and, as discussed earlier, the impact of this on other racial projects. Conversely, the lack of activism for and opposition to mixedness in the UK demonstrates that mixedness is very far from being a 'social movement' and, as discussed earlier, operates more at the level of the personal choice of 'Generation EA' within a post-race framework than at the opposing level of the political demands of 'The New Coloured People' within a pro-race framework. As such, to continue to apply or transpose American understandings of mixedness to the British context indiscriminately would not only be inappropriate but bears the real danger of replicating a similarly divisive discourse.

In light of the findings that have been presented in this thesis, there is then a need when conceptualising mixedness not just to be aware of the divergence in mixed race projects in the USA and UK but to reassess the study of mixedness as whole. Now that mixedness is establishing itself as a racial project in both countries – whether firmly as in the States or tentatively as in the UK – it must be engaged with not simply in terms of raising its visibility but in an honest yet considered way. As such, there are several key areas of engagement and reflection concerning approaches to the field of mixedness which need to be considered by those theorising the subject, regardless of the discursive terrain in



which they are located. Academics, activists, journalists, governmental officials, social workers, educationalists, psychologists and others who actively contribute to and influence the debate need to approach mixedness without either pathologising it, glamourising it, infantilising it, essentialising it or trivialising it. Without disparaging the entire ‘second wave’ approach – within which there is a substantial body of perceptive and important work – these five methods of engaging with mixedness can often be found within its framework. Whilst outright pathological approaches to theorising mixedness are now few and far between, those small-scale studies which do not locate their findings within a wider social context reinforce the idea of the confused and ‘marginal’ mixed race person who is the embodiment of racial antagonism.<sup>162</sup> Similarly, approaches which ‘glamourise’ mixed race people as personifying racial harmony and integration, or as acting a conduit for such, diminish the social inequalities and discrimination that often accompany the racialisation of identity. Such approaches, often found in the discourse of multiracial activists and the Generation EA discourse of marketing, are often closely related to those that ‘infantilise’ mixedness, in the sense that they portray mixedness as a state that is only relevant to children, young people and their parents. This focus on ‘rainbow babies’ and their parents implies a level of passivity and dependence inherent in the mixed race state, one again which neglects wider social factors and casts mixedness as an individual or familial issue.

The remaining approaches identified here – essentialising and trivialising mixedness – are themselves linked, both in the sense that they are opposite ends of the same spectrum and in that they are the most difficult approaches to avoid. Indeed, theorising mixedness without essentialising it, is a particularly challenging task. On the one hand, there exists for many theorists the knowledge that race is a social construction and that the concept of ‘pure’ races and, subsequently mixedness, is a mythical one. On the other, there is the awareness that race is engaged with as a social reality and, subsequently, mixedness is – and thus at a theoretical level, needs to be – engaged with as an actual state. Consequently, all analysis of mixed race is, at some level, reifying the idea of

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<sup>162</sup> Udry et. al, (2003).

‘race’ and the ‘mixed’ space in-between, particularly when this idea of race and mixedness is conceptualised in the black and white framework which dominates American and British racial formation processes. Moreover, whilst expanding this framework to include other groups as – or as producing – mixedness avoids reifying blackness and whiteness as the primary elements of race, such an approach yet reifies these groups as races in turn. However, in the sense that some groups are ‘racialised’ more than others, not to include them analytically in the arena of mixedness or to deny their racialised natures ultimately trivialises both their status and the field as a whole. If contemporary understandings of mixedness are not a question of ‘mixed race’ or ‘mixed racialisation’ but of ‘mixed heritage’, ‘mixed ancestry’ or ‘mixed origins’, they may be able to comprehend mixedness on the social psychological level of the individual but to the detriment of comprehending it as part of a wider social process. Although a person who is of perceived white American and white British ‘heritage’ may be as ‘mixed heritage’ as a person of perceived white American and black British ‘heritage’, the racial formation processes of the UK and USA will conceptualise and grant the social identities, statuses and privileges of these ‘mixed’ individuals’ quite differently. As long as elements of some identity formation processes are ‘racialised’, it is important that the field of mixedness deals with mixed ‘race’, in the sense, of course, that this means focusing on the processes that lead to such racialisation, rather than asserting the nature of race as a reality. Again, this argument is not meant to disparage the important work that has been conducted under the remit of the ‘second wave’, nor suggest that the author has avoided the pitfalls of the essentialising approach in this work. However, what is suggested is that there now needs to be more engagement from those who actively contribute to discourse on mixedness in finding ways to both avoid the pitfalls of the ‘second wave’, particularly the traps of essentialising or trivialising the field as it is within these two approaches that the other three pitfalls can also be generally found.

As argued throughout the thesis, one way in which these pitfalls might be avoided is through a ‘third wave’ approach to mixedness. Although it would still appear to be in its infancy, its tentative first steps towards understanding



mixedness suggest the possibility of establishing a sure-footed future path through the field. As it stands now, it would appear that there are three important elements that need to be incorporated to begin to allow a non-essentialised, non-trivialised 'third wave' approach to mixedness. These are: to locate all personal understandings of mixedness within a wider analysis of social phenomenon, racial or otherwise; (Christian, 2000: Small, 2001) to expand analysis of mixedness outside of whiteness and blackness whilst continuing to work within an analytical racial formation theory approach (Mengel, 2001: Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001); and to reflect on the specificity of certain mixed race projects by discerning how other mixed race consciousness and classifications unfold in different national settings (Omi, 2001; px).

These elements of the 'third wave' approach provide their own challenges for theorists of mixedness. Responding to the first element involves engaging honestly and openly with some of the critiques levelled at both multiracial activists and the field of mixedness as a whole. Consequently, it is argued here that it is important that studies of mixed race engage fully with both the personal and the political, if theories of mixedness are to be useful beyond the confines of the mixed race network' and form part of a wider body of race theory, in whatever terms that might be, pro-race, post-race or anti-race/racism, for example.

The second and third elements – expanding analysis of mixedness beyond black and white and reflecting on the specificity of mixed race projects through utilising a comparative lens, may be less taxing theoretically than the notion of reconciling the personal and the political, but they still present a key challenge. This challenge is mainly manifested through the practical act of expanding the field, that is, to find or increase the number of studies and analyses on mixedness that are carried out beyond the white/black framework that has dominated the field so far. Increasingly, inroads are being made into this area, particularly in terms of understanding mixedness in terms of mixed Asian Americans and Native Americans (Wilson, 1992; Williams-León and Nakashima, 2001). In contrast, work in the UK mostly remains bound by the confines of the black/white binary, although a focus on the mixed British 'Anglo-Chinese'

population has recently been provided (Parker, 2001). Whilst more analysis of how mixedness is constructed amongst other racialised groups has the potential to enrich our contemporary understandings, as argued previously it is crucial that such work integrates these particular racial projects into the framework of the national setting rather than present them as isolated snapshots. This means focusing not only on the voices of mixed race people in these groups but incorporating their voices with those of minority monoracials and the ruling racial order to gain a fuller picture of the ways in which the various racial projects are negotiating with and transforming the racial formation process overall. Similarly, it is also critical that further research into the construction of mixedness is conducted, and used comparatively, outside of the white/black binary. Indeed, no matter the temporal or geographical location, it would appear that an identified stigmatised 'other' – whether stigmatised through the racialisation of perceived biological or cultural traits – with whom it is forbidden to 'mix' almost always exists. Focusing on those countries who are engaged in these debates over mixedness but who operate within an alternative racialised hegemonic sphere to the white American and British ones – such as Japan, China or any number of 'Arab' states – or even a different stigmatised process altogether – such as the sectarian divides of Northern Ireland – will no doubt provide great insights into both the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of mixedness as well as the specificity of individual projects. Comparatively focused research in which the main binary tension is not positioned as occurring between black and white and where whiteness, in particular, is conceptualised as an element which challenges the racial order, will enable us to understand further the similarities and differences between those social relations that work to produce ideas of mixedness and, as such, to develop strategies to deal with the inequalities and discrimination that such ideas may produce.

As this thesis has demonstrated, understanding the key perceptions, constructions and implications of mixedness in the UK and USA is a challenging yet important task. After long histories of conceptualising mixedness as a primarily negative



state. both countries are now engaging with positive counter-conceptualisations which can significantly influence the ways in which mixed race people, and those around them, view and engage with mixedness. With these counter-discourses putting mixed race firmly in the arena of racial theory, key challenges lie ahead for future theorists of mixedness. As the counter-discourses compete with 'first wave' discourses to become the dominant conceptualisation of mixedness, it is important that those working in the field of mixed race engage thoughtfully and critically with the subject. This means both reflecting on and responding to the criticisms that have been levelled at the field as well as pursuing creatively analytical ways through which to undertake further research. For those in a British context, this means recognising the specificity of the American framework and establishing both a more British-centred approach as well as new comparative frameworks in which to analyse mixedness. Withdrawing from the American model to construct other comparative frameworks in which mixedness is posited largely in terms of black and white – such as Brazil, the West Indies, South Africa, Australia and even the little focused on Western European arena – may provide new insights into the racial dynamics between blackness and whiteness in the British context that are obscured by an over-reliance on interpreting these dynamics according to the American model. Equally, for those in the American context, similar comparative research would encourage the recognition of what appears to be the uniqueness of American conceptualisations of mixedness within those racialised societies where division is primarily conceived in terms of black and white. Indeed, comparative work that has been conducted on mixedness and wider racial formation processes in the USA and Brazil, for example, would seem to indicate further how unique the American racialisation process is in both its systematic application of and sustained emphasis on the concept of hypodescent. As the 'New Coloured People' debates over the US Census have shown, the assertion that Deglar made in 1970s – 'in Brazil the mulatto is not a Negro, whereas in the United States he is' (Deglar, 1971: pxii) – still holds true. Whilst the development of racial formation processes in Brazil have not eradicated, and indeed do still support, racisms of various forms, there is a much more flexible

and ambiguous attitude to racial relations and racial mixing than found in the United States<sup>163</sup>. As outlined earlier, with evidence of a developing 'Generation EA, post-race' approach to contemporary mixedness emerging in the UK, it may be more useful for future work on mixedness in the UK to construct comparative frameworks that identify specificities and commonalities with more flexible Latin American models such as Brazil than to continue to focus on those between the UK and the United States. In both cases, conducting more comparative work outside of the black and white binary – such as in Eastern Asia – would allow theorists to gain useful insights into those parallel and divergent processes that produce the idea of mixed race.

The emergent field of mixed race studies is a difficult one through which to manoeuvre yet for all the challenges it remains both fascinating and rewarding in its potential to highlight and question racialisation processes that are often elusive or taken for granted. In its presentation of the key perceptions, constructions and implications of contemporary mixedness in the UK and USA, it is hoped that this thesis has managed to rise to some of these challenges and has provoked some thought about those that lie ahead.

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<sup>163</sup> For analysis of racial formation patterns in Brazil and Latin America, see Degler (1971); Pitt-Rivers (1973); Sansone (2003).



Table 1. Naming conventions applied to white and African American origin populations on the general schedules of decennial censuses: 1790-1990

Racial Category†	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
White	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coloured				X	X	X														
Slave	X	X	X		X	X	X													
Black (Negro)							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mulatto							X	X	X	X	X		X	X						
Quadroon											X									
Octoroon											X									
Afro-American																				X

†As appearing on the schedules of the U.S. Censuses of Population in the ‘Race’ item.  
Adapted from Robbin (1999), p472.

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## Appendix I

Census 2001 Forms for England/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland  
Form reproduced from NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency)  
<<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/metadata/ETHPUK.html>>

### England/Wales

**8 What is your ethnic group?**

Choose ONE section from A to E, then ✓ the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

**A White**

☐ British ☐ Irish

☐ Any other White background, please write in

**B Mixed**

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed background, please write in

**C Asian or Asian British**

☐ Indian ☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Any other Asian background, please write in

**D Black or Black British**

☐ Caribbean ☐ African

☐ Any other Black background, please write in

**E Chinese or other ethnic group**

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other, please write in

## Scotland

**15 What is your ethnic group?**

Choose ONE section from A to E, then ✓ the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

**A White**

☐ Scottish

☐ Other British

☐ Irish

☐ Any other White background,  
please write in

**B Mixed**

☐ Any Mixed background,  
please write in

**C Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British**

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Asian background,  
please write in

**D Black, Black Scottish or Black British**

☐ Caribbean

☐ African

☐ Any other Black background,  
please write in

**E Other ethnic background**

☐ Any other background,  
please write in

## Northern Ireland

10 To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

☐ White

☐ Chinese

☐ Irish Traveller

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Black Caribbean

☐ Black African

☐ Black Other

☐ Mixed ethnic group, write in

☐ Any other ethnic group, write in



## Appendix II

### *Semi-structured Interview Schedules: ONS representatives*

#### The process of including the category

1. Why did ONS think that a 'Mixed' category was important enough for it to be discussed by the working group?
2. How were the members of the working group chosen?
3. How was the 'Mixed' focus group chosen?
4. As the largest mixed race organisation, why were PIH not consulted?

#### The category itself

1. 'Mixed race' seems to be the term most commonly used in the UK – why did ONS decide on 'Mixed' as a category? What other terms, if any, were considered?
1. Why was the 'Mixed' category described as an ethnic rather than a racial category?
2. What was the 'Mixed' category broken down into the four sub-sections? Why was the 'Mixed White and Black' category broken down but not the 'Mixed White and Asian' category?
3. Why was the 'Mixed' category set out with the 'White' section first?
4. The attempt to have a 'Multiracial' category included on the US Census failed due, amongst other things, to the influence of African American groups. Did ONS come across any opposition to the 'Mixed' category, to the wording, etc?

#### Implications

1. Overall, how satisfactory does ONS think the category is?
2. What implications does ONS think the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category will have for ethnic categorisation in the next census?
3. Would ONS say that 'Mixed' has now become an official racial or ethnic category and if so what are the implications of this?

4. There is an argument in some of the US literature that the Census actually shapes rather than reflects ethnicities. Does ONS agree with this?
5. Any other comments?



*Semi-structured Interview Schedules: Members of '2001 Census Working Subgroup on the Ethnic Group Question'*

The process of including the category

1. What was your role on the Census Sub-group, i.e. why were you asked to join it and what organisation/group do you represent?
2. What did you think about the proposal to include a 'Mixed' category?
3. What level of influence did you have on the decision to include the 'Mixed' category?
4. Who did you think was significant in the decision to include the 'Mixed' category?
5. Overall, were you satisfied with the process of inclusion for the 'Mixed' category by ONS, e.g. were enough people consulted, were opposing views taken into consideration?

The category itself

2. 'Mixed race' seems to be the term most commonly used in the UK – why did the Sub-group decide on 'Mixed' as a category? What other terms, if any, were considered?
5. Why was the 'Mixed' category described as an ethnic rather than a racial category?
6. What was the 'Mixed' category broken down into the four sub-sections? Why was the 'Mixed White and Black' category broken down but not the 'Mixed White and Asian' category?
7. Why was the 'Mixed' category set out with the 'White' section first?
8. The attempt to have a 'Multiracial' category included on the US Census failed due, amongst other things, to the influence of African American groups. Did the Sub-group come across any opposition to the 'Mixed' category, to the wording, etc?

Implications

1. Overall, how satisfactory does ONS think the category is?
2. What implications do you think the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category will have for ethnic categorisation in the next census?
3. Would you say that 'Mixed' has now become an official racial or ethnic category and if so what are the implications of this?
4. There is an argument in some of the US literature that the Census actually shapes rather than reflects ethnicities. Do you agree with this?
5. Any other comments?

*Semi-structured Interview: Academic expert not consulted on inclusion of 'Mixed' category*

The process of inclusion

1. Despite your experience and knowledge of mixed race and ethnic data monitoring forms in the UK, why were you not asked to be a member of the Sub-group?
2. What did you think about the proposal to include a 'Mixed' category?
3. Who did you think should have been involved in the decision to include the 'Mixed' category?
4. From what you know of the process, were you satisfied with how ONS went about including the 'Mixed' category, e.g. were enough people consulted, were opposing views taken into consideration?

The category itself

1. 'Mixed race' seems to be the term most commonly used in the UK – why do you think the Sub-group decided on 'Mixed' as a category? Are there any other terms that you think might have been better?
2. Why do you think the 'Mixed' category was described as an ethnic rather than a racial category?
3. What is your opinion on the way in which ONS broke the 'Mixed' category broken down into the four sub-sections? What is your opinion of breaking down the 'Mixed White and Black' category but not the 'Mixed White and Asian' category?
4. What is your opinion of the way in which ONS set out the 'Mixed' category with the 'White' section first?
5. The attempt to have a 'Multiracial' category included on the US Census failed due, amongst other things, to the influence of African American groups. Have you come across any opposition to the 'Mixed' category, to the wording, etc? Do you think this is likely?

Implications

1. Overall, how satisfactory do you think the 'Mixed' category is?
2. What implications do you think the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category will have for ethnic categorisation in the next census?
3. Would you say that 'Mixed' has now become an official racial or ethnic category and if so what are the implications of this?



4. Any other comments?

### Appendix III

#### *Questionnaire distributed to PIH members*

1. How was PIH involved in the process to include a 'Mixed' category on the 2001 Census – did it lobby for the inclusion of the category, was it consulted as to wording, etc?
2. Was PIH satisfied with the process involved in including the category on the Census – e.g. the groups of people consulted, the number of people consulted, etc. Would PIH have preferred anything to have been done differently?
3. How important would PIH say it was for a 'Mixed' category to be included on the census? Why?
4. Was PIH satisfied with the wording of the category itself - e.g. would they have preferred a 'multiracial', 'biracial' or 'mixed heritage' label?
5. Did PIH find the way in which the category was broken down – into the four sections of 'White and Black Caribbean', 'White and Black African', 'White and Asian' and 'Any other Mixed background' – satisfactory?
6. What did PIH think about the labelling of the 'mixed' category as an ethnic rather than a racial category?
7. Do PIH think that there is a popular conception in the UK of what racial or ethnic backgrounds 'mixed race' people come from?
8. Do PIH have any thoughts on when 'mixed race' stops being 'mixed race'? What would be the factors involved?
9. Are PIH aware of any opposition to the inclusion of the Mixed category? If so, what form has this opposition taken?
10. Any other comments?